LONDON SOCIETY.

JANUARY, 1893.

A Third Person.

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CHAPTER I.

"BABY BAGGOT."

IF Mrs. Harrington Baggot had not written a shamefully careless hand, and made impossible figures—her threes like fives, her nines indistinguishable from sevens—perhaps her nephew, Roger Hope, might have remained heart-whole until the present hour. Who knows? Who knows how much may depend upon the hasty scratch of—a pen? Captain Hope knocked and rang at 13, Holland Gardens, instead of at No. 15, and saw his fate at the window. It was almost dusk on a soft September evening, and as the new arrival waited on the steps he glanced involuntarily into an adjacent casement, and found himself face to face with a tall girl, who was leaning her forehead against the sash in a despondent attitude and looking intensely miserable. For half a second their eyes met, and then she drew hastily back, and was immediately swallowed up in the shadows of the room.

"Who could she be?" Roger asked himself. Not one of his cousins, surely—they were years his senior. So perplexed was he by the momentary vision, that when the door was eventually opened by a man servant of severe aspect, there was an appreciable pause before he could collect his wits and ask:

"Is Mrs. Baggot at home?"

To which he received the unexpected answer:

"No, sir; next house; No. 15."

* * * * *

Morpingham is a provincial town of considerable importance

and still greater pretensions—the favourite resort of a certain class who seek genteel and congenial society, moderately-rented houses and cheap schools. The actual town is comparatively small; it is, so to speak, choked up by the overwhelming extent of its suburbs, with their terraces, places, rows and gardens. The population chiefly consists of school-boys, retired officers, Indian civilians and a few of the clergy; there is also a fair allowance of doctors and whole brigades of pretty girls; but young men above the age of seventeen are almost as rare as black swans. The sons of numerous families have invariably left the parental nest and winged their way out into the world. Some are soldiers, some are sailors, some are engineers or doctors, others are stockmen, railway guards or shepherds, whilst a few have gone under in the great struggle for existence and become that pitiable spectacle in Eastern lands, the European loafer or the dreaded Australian "sun-downer." Occasionally, at long intervals, some of these absent ones return to Morpingham, and when a household is about to welcome a son, a nephew, or even an uncle on leave, his advent—if he is unmarried—is an event that is joyfully hailed in local society. The gardens and terraces in the immediate neighbourhood issue invitations to tea, cosy little luncheons, and even dinners, and the new arrival receives more formal calls from elderly gentlemen in one day, than in all the years of his previous life.

Mrs. Baggot, a widow lady residing at No. 15, Holland Gardens, is the centre of interest at the present moment within a radius of at least two postmen's beats. She is known to be expecting her nephew—her sister's son—and has made no secret of the fact that he is young, tolerably good-looking and a bachelor. This callous, phlegmatic old woman is not nearly as much excited about her guest as are the four Miss Strattons, who live just across the road, and have been peeping over their blinds since ten o'clock in the morning. Mrs. Baggot received and sped arrivals and departures with the utmost serenity—possibly the result of a protracted residence in the East, where society is constantly fluctuating; and just now, when the young ladies over the way are on the tip-toe of expectation, and when her nephew is actually ringing a loud peal at the wrong house, she is comfortably buried in an arm-chair and a novel, her cap askew and one slipper off, lost to the existence of any one but the hero of her

story. Roger's room is ready, Annie has seen to it, and that there is a nice dinner and plenty of cigars and soda water in the house. Watching for people never brings them any sooner; indeed, she might have added, with truth, that she rather hoped Roger would not put in an appearance, until she had closed her third volume.

Mrs. Baggot had lived in Morpingham for ten years, in spite of which long residence among them, many of its inhabitants declared "that they could not make her out." Some said she was a charming woman, full of wit, vivacity and fascination; others, that she was a wicked old creature, whose morals and complexion would not bear the most superficial scrutiny. Others, again, calmly dismissed her as mad.

In truth, she was neither mad or bad—not even, as Tallyrand expressed himself to two companions, *entre les deux.* Merely a woman of sixty, blessed with a superb constitution, an extraordinary supply of animal spirits, and the energy of a champion tennis player.

In spite of her somewhat advanced years, this exceptionally favoured matron displayed an insatiable appetite for enjoying life, and absolutely refused to range herself as an old lady. Her two daughters (a widow and a spinster) were powerless to restrain their sprightly parent; she was cleverer than either, with a decided will, and an income of eighteen hundred a year—of which the reversion remained entirely in her own hands.

Mrs. Baggot's career may be summed up in a few sentences. Married at nineteen, she had gone out to India with her husband, and found it to be a country entirely after her own heart. She liked the continued change of residence, the constant moves, the immense variety of acquaintances; and India, so to speak, liked her. She was pretty, good-humoured and gay; she never made spiteful speeches, threw over partners at dances, or, most fatal step, shared a house with another lady—consequently, she had many friends. She sang and acted well, and entered enthusiastically into every scheme of amusement, on the plains in winter and the hills in summer.

Years rolled on, her husband rose in his profession, became grey, stout and elderly; not so his wife; she still danced and sang and acted and rode, and when her girls appeared upon the scene, kept at home till they were out of their teens. She accepted

the post of *chaperon* in a sisterly fashion, introduced her partners, sang duets with her dear children, rode with them, acted with them, and did all in her power to get them satisfactorily married. Now the Misses Baggot may have been—and doubtless were—good, but they were by no means beautiful; moreover they were dowdy and dull, and people were amused to witness the singular spectacle of a mother waltzing untiringly all night, whilst her unappreciated daughters sat benched among the wallflowers. However, in due time, Clara, the youngest, became engaged to Mr. Skyler, a civilian of some standing, and the wedding took place with considerable *éclat*; but Annie, the elder, seemed likely always to remain a home bird. "She is such an excellent girl," her friends would declare, "quite a domestic treasure; but, poor dear, she is so plain, with her brick-dust complexion and drab-coloured eyes and hair."

Alas! for those grand old days, when every young lady who rounded the Cape was married as a matter of course. In former times, when the century was young, and when people spent months *en route* to Calcutta—meanwhile making life-long enemies or friends—a man was prepared to marry and settle down in the East: there was no such thing as running home in fifteen days; he deliberately accepted his fate, and was only too eager to propose to the first fresh-looking English girl whom Providence (or her relations) threw in his way. But this was forty years ago, and even had Annie Baggot lived in those excellent times, she might have found a certain amount of difficulty in being mated; as it was, she returned to England on her father's death, plain Miss Baggot in every sense of the word, and settled down at Morpingham as her mother's housekeeper, companion and *chaperon*, for she was exceedingly prim, and much older and more staid in her tastes and pursuits than her volatile parent.

The rector of the parish, the tradespeople and the servants had the deepest respect for Miss Baggot, with her regular attendance at matins, her punctually paid red pass books and her bright bunch of keys; she experienced no difficulty in falling into the ways of English society, and what was equally important, the ways of English domestics, whereas Mrs. Baggot was of comparatively small account, save that she signed the cheques.

A woman who sailed out of church before the sermon, who

attempted to bargain in shops—forgetting that she was no longer in the land of hawkers—and who occasionally so far forgot herself as to address her servants in Hindustani, and who on her first arrival had frequently been heard to scream, in accents of an unknown tongue, the curious words "Qui hye."

Annie never shared her mother's cravings for "a run up to town," for going to theatres and subsequently partaking of tasty little suppers; she did not glory in hansoms, or cross the street with her most fascinating smile, to accost young men of her acquaintance; she neither smoked cigarettes, danced round dances, or sang in the local glee club. Now Mrs. Baggot did all these things; and it was small wonder that ladies of her own age, who had long succumbed to time, and wore their own respectable white hair and comfortable cap and spectacles, and were afraid of the damp, of draughts and of burglars, did not approve of their evergreen contemporary.

This vigorous and vivacious lady always announced that she was "precisely the age she felt, which was thirty," thus cutting down her years by nearly half, and becoming junior to her own children! She had kept her figure, which was plump, but not fat; she had a remarkably pretty foot (hence ill-natured people said she was constantly losing her shoe), and wore a most superior fringe of false chesnut curls (of which she was not a whit ashamed, indeed she referred to it openly, to the great scandal of her relations), an aquiline nose—that seemed made expressly for a *pince-nez*—and a pair of expressive eyes, were not the least of Mrs. Baggot's attractions. She dressed in the height of the fashion, and her gorgeous tea-gowns and rich dinner toilettes were another cause of offence; they were far too showy and quite preposterously young. Their wearer frankly enjoyed every hour of existence, from her "Chotah Hazree" and her letters, to the hour when she removed her jaunty cap and *toupée*. She was untroubled by domestic worries, they were exclusively Annie's affair. She ate well, slept well and had no ailments; she went to "teas," dinners, dances and concerts; was but an irregular attendant at church, and gave her neighbours one boon, an inexhaustible subject for conversation. Behind her back they called her "Baby Baggot," but indeed her character gave scope for a variety of interpretations.

A ring at the bell and voices in the hall startled Mrs. Baggot

from the regions of romance. She hastily doubled back her volume—it was only a library book—fished for her shoe, settled her cap at the mirror, and sailed out to greet her nephew.

"Well, Roger," she exclaimed, putting up her face to kiss him, "how are you? Dear me! how nice to be kissed by a moustache again."

"Mother," expostulated Annie in an agonized aside, "*the cabman;*" then to that worthy in a louder key, "Yes, please, take the luggage up to the first floor and be careful of the paint on the walls."

"Come into the drawing-room with me, my dear boy, and let me have a good look at you," said his aunt, taking him by the arm and leading him up to a window. "I declare," putting on her glasses, and still holding him by the sleeve, "you have actually grown up quite a good-looking fellow."

Roger laughed, as he rejoined, "Which was evidently more than you expected."

"Yes, and dark like all the Hopes; I was the fairest of the family, and I was quite a brunette." The young man's eyes rested for a second on her bright chesnut fringe, and she continued: "Let me think. Why, it is twelve years since I saw you last. Do you remember at Lucknow? you had just joined—a lanky, shy, sallow boy without a word to say for yourself, and all your thoughts concentrated on your boots and breeches."

"Well, I am thankful that you find me improved since those days."

"Yes, bold as brass and brown as a berry would describe you now. Do you know that you have a little look of my Clara——."

"My dear Aunt Polly, you don't mean to tell me that she is as bold as brass and brown as a berry."

"No, you very rude young man. She is fair, and I am sorry to say she is from home just now, for *she* is the one to entertain you. However, she will be back next week. The subscription dances are coming off soon, and I guarantee you plenty of pretty partners."

"Thanks; but I doubt if I shall be here. There is likely to be a row on the borders of the great Indian Empire, and I may be recalled any day."

"Then pray why did you not come down and see me before, Master Roger, instead of leaving me to the last like that?"

"Last, but not least," he rejoined with a smile.

"Come, come, that is all very fine; don't imagine that you can appease an old woman like me with pretty speeches."

All the same she was secretly delighted with her soldierly-looking nephew; he had a pleasant voice, a pair of merry dark eyes and an infectious smile.

"I suppose you are the beauty man in your regiment," she remarked, as she removed her *pince-nez*.

"My dear aunt, surely you were long enough in India to know that dark people are not appreciated out there."

"Ha! ha! ha!" she laughed. "Yes, coals to Newcastle. I only hope that the young ladies here won't turn your head or steal your heart."

"Oh! I never had much of a head at the best of times; as to my heart, I don't possess such an organ in the sense *you* mean."

"What!" in a tone of affected horror. "Gone already! Lost in India?"

"Not likely. There are so many chances of losing it up among the Chin hills; but I don't intend to marry. Marriage in the army should be absolutely prohibited. A married officer is a mistake."

"Oh! indeed," rejoined his aunt sarcastically. "You will change your mind and think very differently some day."

"For that matter I do sometimes think differently, as it is; when I have not a button to my name, and they give us filthy dinners at mess, and the ante-room fire smokes, and fellows argue or bore, I say to myself, 'By Jove! I wish I was a married man.'"

"Of course you do," agreed the old lady emphatically.

"Yes, for about five minutes, and then when everything is all right, and a lot of fellows from detachment turn up, and we get orders for active service and are all jolly and cheery, I say to myself, 'I would not be married for a million pounds;' and in case you are thinking of getting me settled in life, I warn you that these are my sentiments."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Roger; that is all I can say. So you only wish for a wife when you are ragged and cross and hungry! You must be hungry now. There is the dressing bell—first dinner bugle, you know. Be off, my dear, and get ready; you need not curl your hair or wear a button-hole—we are quite alone."

CHAPTER II.

THE GIRL NEXT DOOR.

THANKS to Miss Baggots' patient instruction, the cook at No. 15 understood the art of pleasing the most fastidious palate. Dinner, which proved to be excellent, was served at a round table, lighted by a huge red hanging lamp, whose rosy tints were sufficiently becoming to Mrs. Baggot in a moss green velvet tea-gown, with diamonds in her ears, and an airy arrangement on her head; also to her nephew, with his dark resolute face. But poor Annie looked, if possible, plainer than ever. Why did she thus lay down her arms and make no fight with fate? Why did she screw her hair off her face, and dress in drab?

As tasty *entrées* and toothsome savories appeared and disappeared, conversation waxed brisker, especially between aunt and nephew, for Annie had contributed a few bald remarks about the weather, the dust and the last Dorcas meeting, and then relapsed into silence.

"By-the-by, I went to the wrong house by mistake," said Captain Hope.

"Not to No. 13!" repeated Mrs. Baggot tragically.

"Yes, next door. You make your threes so like fives that I thought you lived at No. 13."

"I am truly thankful to say that I do *not*. I suppose you saw no one but old Leech?"

"I saw an ancient retainer, who opened the door *quite* at his leisure, and I also saw some one in a bow window. You know you can almost touch it from the steps."

"Yes, ours is the same; and any one sitting in one bow window sees all that goes on in the other. I just mention this as a friendly caution. Who did you see?"

"Oh—" and after a momentary pause he replied, "I saw rather a nice-looking girl."

"Ha! ha! Master Roger, how quickly you discovered her. And pray what was she doing?" demanded his lively aunt.

"As well as I could make out, she appeared to be crying. Perhaps it was only my imagination, or she may merely have been reading 'Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy'—at any rate, she seemed rather sorry for herself."

"She was crying, most probably," returned Mrs. Baggot with conviction. "And I don't wonder; if I were her I would never do anything else. She leads a miserable life."

"Why, who is she?" inquired the young man.

"She is the granddaughter of a fierce old veteran who lives next door—General Yaldwin."

"You don't mean Yaldwin who was at Mhow years ago? He was the terror of his staff, and never had an A.D.C. longer than a fortnight."

"The very same. He is now the terror of this neighbourhood, myself excepted, but I don't care a button for him. There is the general, his wife, who is rather feeble and almost stone deaf—so much the better for her, poor soul!—and this girl, who is about nineteen and very pretty in *my* opinion, though to you, fresh from the Chin hills she may appear only 'rather nice-looking,'" mimicking her nephew.

"Oh, come, I say, Aunt Polly, I only saw her for a second, and it was getting dark; but I am prepared to go as far as *you* do, and say that she is very pretty."

"Yes, many people go further than either of us, and declare that she is lovely. All the same, poor girl, I am sure she often wishes she was dead."

"Mother! how *can* you say such horrible things?" protested Miss Baggot in a distressed voice.

"I judge her by myself," rejoined her mother briskly. "If I were young and pretty, and in her shoes, I should either hang myself from a hook in the larder, or elope with the milkman."

"My dearest, dearest mother!" expostulated her offspring.

"Oh, you need not be afraid of my shocking Roger. I am always scaring Annie," she explained, with a nod at her nephew. "She makes me feel quite a child again, and carries me back to the dear old days when I had nurse or governess. I often imagine that Annie is old Miss Grasper. As for Rose Yaldwin, when I was her age I had a house of my own and plenty of fun, whilst she is nothing better than a white slave."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that she does all the housekeeping for those two cranky old people. One won't eat boiled, the other won't eat roast; one won't drink tea, the other won't touch coffee; one likes open windows, the other a roaring fire. She dresses and waits on

her grandmother, and plays cribbage and beggar my neighbour with her for hours at a stretch; and reads the papers to him, and answers most of his letters."

"Servant, secretary, housekeeper and playmate—she must have her hands pretty full," said Captain Hope.

"Of course she has, and never a moment to herself. I am surprised she found time to cry!" continued Mrs. Baggot volubly.

"She knows no other young people, unless you consider Annie a young girl; never gets any new clothes—she is disgracefully shabby. I would like to give her a smart hat, only I know the general would kick it into the street. And her sole relaxation consists in an hour's brisk constitutional with him, during which time they never open their lips. To my certain knowledge she has led this life for the last three years, and that is why I call her a white slave."

"Does she never get a day off duty?"

"Never. The general has one married daughter, a Mrs. Randall, a buxom, bustling person with a grown-up family, but they are wise in their generation, and live at a respectful distance from dear grandpapa; *they* know him too well, and leave Rose to bear the brunt of the fray, for she is figuratively chained to the stake, being a friendless, penniless orphan. Upon my word, if I were her I would run away."

Miss Baggot, who had been fidgeting and making little signals, and long and vainly endeavouring to stem the current of her mother's discourse, now broke in:

"I am thankful that Carson has left the room at last. Do you know, mother, that she was drinking in every word you said, and she is certain to repeat it all to the Yaldwins' cook."

"She is perfectly welcome to do so, my dear," was the undaunted reply. "She cannot tell the woman anything she does not know already. She knows that Miss Yaldwin is an orphan, dependent entirely on her grandparents. When they depart this life, and are cremated or otherwise disposed of, Jane Randall will swoop down upon the scene, wind up affairs, inherit their money, and turn the girl adrift. I suppose she will go out as companion; at any rate, she is thoroughly broken in, and may always come to me for a reference."

"Why don't you have her here sometimes, Aunt Polly?"

inquired Roger Hope. "I thought you were fond of surrounding yourself with young people?"

"She does run in occasionally for a cup of tea and a little chat, but you see the old lady is rather weak in her mind and she cannot be left."

"Have they no servants?"

"That's what I am always saying, am I not, Annie?"

"Yes, mother, but don't you think that Rose Yaldwin's ears must be almost alight? You have scarcely talked of any one else for the last half-hour."

"Her ears alight! Ha! ha! And that reminds me—Roger, light up; where are your cheroots? For my own part, I am going to enjoy a mild cigarette."

Hereupon ensued the curious spectacle of an aunt smoking and discussing army topics with her nephew, whilst her much-disgusted daughter withdrew to an arm-chair, and sniffed and coughed and tatted in the background. It was ever thus since childhood's hour! Poor Annie was invariably left out in the cold. In the drawing-room the situation was identical. Mrs. Baggot trailed over to the open piano, spread out her velvet skirts, took off her bracelets, cleared her throat, and broke into song.

How devoutly Annie wished that her mother would *not* sing. How absurd it was to hear a woman of her age attempting Braga's "Serenata," and bitterly lamenting the lack of a violin accompaniment. Once upon a time she had possessed a magnificent organ, but now it had shrunk woefully from its former grand compass. Mrs. Baggot still retained a few sweet notes on her register, of which she made the very most, for she was a thorough musician and sang with taste, indeed, her singing was still rather pleasant when she did not venture to soar beyond her capabilities and go scampering up the gamut after a high note, which she barely touched with a shriek. On these not uncommon occasions the audience would glance at one another significantly, and her daughters' faces would be covered with shame. Musical parties were of constant occurrence, and these unnatural children were actually thankful when their mother had a slight hoarseness, or even a cold. There was no use in mislaying her music or leaving it (purposely) in cabs; unfortunately, the gifted lady could generally sing without it, and she did not trust to

chance or her girls' memories. Once or twice, when they had eagerly whispered to their hostess that "their mother had not brought her music," she had dumbfoundered them by producing a neatly-folded song from the recesses of her pocket.

Roger, as his aunt soon discovered, had a nice baritone voice, and she immediately hunted up some duets and sang them with him *con amore*; indeed, the pair amused themselves at the piano until it was bedtime. This was the fashion in which eccentric Mrs. Baggot generally contrived to monopolize young men. She was vivacious, entertaining and well preserved, and therefore, as she would have inquired with her blandest smile, "Why not?"

CHAPTER III.

GENERAL, MRS. AND MISS YALDWIN.

THE following day was Sunday, and when Captain Hope came down to breakfast, his aunt, as she glanced at his black coat, exclaimed in a voice of anxious protestation:

"Roger, you don't mean to say that you are going to church?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so. Are not you?"

"No; I was thinking how nice it would be if you and I were to take two big wicker chairs and sit out in the back garden and have a long chat and a smoke this lovely morning.

"Mother, you seem to forget that every dining-room window in the road commands our back garden. Just think of what the neighbours will say!" urged Miss Baggot with considerable asperity.

"They say a great deal about me as it is, my dear, and I'm none the worse for it. I believe the Skinners and the Coombes call me an old heathen. I suppose they think the Burmese figure in the hall is an idol I have imported to worship, and I know they declare that I don't go to church because the Ten Commandments are too much for me and make me quite hysterical. However, I must honestly confess that I'd rather sit out under the little beech tree with a cigarette and Roger, among the birds and flowers, listening to news of old friends—aye, and of old enemies—than be boxed up in a tight pew in St. Chadwick's, when half the people are watching their neighbours and looking at and pricing each other's clothes and thinking every-day thoughts. I don't very often go to church, Roger——"

"Very often!" interrupted Annie. "Why, mother, you know you have not been for two months."

"Have I not? I did not know you kept count. Well, I suppose I may as well go this morning, eh, Roger? It is not far, and we can walk there in less than ten minutes. I do hope that they will open the ventilators and that we shall have some of my favourite hymn tunes."

Mrs. Baggot required a considerable time to dress, meanwhile her nephew went out and smoked a cheroot in the front of the house, and took stock of his surroundings. The villas in Holland Gardens were semi-detached, substantially-built grey structures, three stories high, with large bow windows at either side of the hall door; a narrow strip of garden, planted with trim shrubs, was divided by an iron railing from the neighbouring plot, and a neat gate, with dazzling brass plate, led to each residence. Comfortable solid mansions, with immaculate blinds, white steps and burnished letter-boxes—houses that, if they did not speak of cheerfulness and gaiety, had gentility, high rent and solid comfort written all over them.

Presently Mrs. Baggot appeared, looking absolutely radiant, as she rustled down the gravel path with a smart French bonnet on her head, a coquettish veil over her face, and her figure enveloped in an elegant mantle. Yes. She was certainly more attractive in appearance than poor Annie, in a mean little grey frock and dowdy brown bonnet.

Handing her church service to her daughter, Mrs. Baggot took her nephew's arm, and set forth; her progress was a sort of triumphal march—she met many people upon whom she beamed; crowds of ladies, and not a few pretty girls—all without male escort; and here was she, and old woman of nearly sixty, leaning on the arm of that extraordinary rarity, a good-looking, young and unmarried man. Poor Annie was, as usual, nought, and left to bring up the rear alone, though her cousin had relieved her of the books with which she was laden.

St. Chadwick's was a fashionable church, boasting a fine choir and an eloquent preacher, and was consequently crowded.

Mrs. Baggot swept up the aisle with the assured gait of an owner of sittings, and the air of a woman who would just like to see any one occupying her pew, and made her way to a seat in a sufficiently prominent position.

Presently Roger, having stowed away his hat, began to look about him. He noted that his aunt had removed her gloves and produced a scent bottle—beyond that he descried quantities of bonnets, some bald and grey heads, but scarcely a man of his own age. As the organ pealed out the voluntary, and the choir filed in, he was aware that people were arriving at the pew just in front. First came a fragile bent old lady, with a pale, placid face, and an enormous ear-trumpet in her hand; next, a young girl carrying books and an air-cushion; lastly, an unmistakable soldier, very spare and upright, with a leaden-coloured complexion, heavy moustache, lantern jaw and an extremely grim expression. "This was the old Tartar," said Roger to himself. Yes, and he looked it too, but a gentlemanly and well-groomed Tartar. The younger man's keen eye noted the immaculate cut of his frock coat, the gloss on his linen, his neat gloves, and above all, the shine on his hat. To General Yaldwin the safety of this article seemed a matter of almost religious care—he held it delicately between a finger and thumb, and from his backward glance, it was evident that he had been accustomed to stow it away in Mrs. Baggot's frequently empty pew. As he seemed undecided, and held it with apparent hesitation, Roger Hope, who was notoriously prompt in action, actually seized it out of his hand, and calmly put it away along with his own. No words could fitly paint the expression of General Yaldwin's face, where fury and astonishment strove for mastery; but as church is the one place where it is impossible to have a row, he was forced to restrain his indignation and resign himself to circumstances.

Captain Hope, blissfully unaware of the storm of emotion he had roused in his neighbour's breast, permitted his glances to rove about in the manner so much deprecated by his aunt. She was now down on her knees praying audibly, with tightly-closed eyes and clasped hands—very pretty hands still, and blazing with diamonds. "Was it absolutely necessary to devotion to remove one's gloves?" her nephew wondered. The general had stuck to his, his granddaughter to hers. It must be admitted that Captain Hope, instead of attending to the service, was critically watching Miss Rose Yaldwin. She was kneeling down, and he remarked her slender figure and the shiny seams of her cloth jacket, her thick plaits of hair and her shabby limp black hat, and was angrily comparing her garments with her relatives' broadcloth and

velvet. During morning prayer, a good deal of his interest was concentrated on the Yaldwin family, on the old lady, who fumbled for surreptitious peppermints, on the general, who repeated the responses as if he were shouting on parade—but chiefly on the young lady, who found her grandmother's places, following the lines with a much-mended glove, in order that her too audible responses might not intrude in the middle of a prayer. In spite of her anxious precautions, this actually did happen once—"our sovereign lady Queen"—"Amen," cried Mrs. Yaldwin's shrill falsetto, which unexpected alteration in the Christian name of her most gracious Majesty caused some young people in an adjoining pew to explode in delighted giggles, and occasioned the general to bestow on his grandchild a truly savage scowl.

Miss Yaldwin had a sweet clear soprano voice, but Roger could scarcely hear anything above the piercing notes at his side, for in church, with a grand volume of sound, and other voices around her, Mrs. Baggot let out her own organ to what had once been its fullest compass, but was now a mere succession of heartrending shrieks. Service over, the sermon commenced. Miss Yaldwin found the text for her grandmother, and handed her her ear-trumpet, through which the old lady piously endeavoured to catch a clear, eloquent and concise discourse. The subject was unselfishness and self-sacrifice. Would that some of the good words would come home to the hearts of this venerable couple seated in front of him, thought Roger Hope. Did they realize that to them was sacrificed the youth, and what ought to be the happiest days of the unfortunate girl who sat between them? No, the old woman's expression had resolved itself into a vacant complacent stare. The general sat with his arms folded, and an expression about his eyebrows that seemed to imply that it was all rather poor stuff, and he could deliver a much better sermon, if so disposed, himself. As for the domestic martyr, Miss Yaldwin, he had come to the conclusion that she was a good girl; she did not stare about when released from her duties; she had seemed absorbed in prayer—and hers was no eye service; every movement of her grandmother's was watched; every wish carefully forestalled; and he had come to the conclusion that she was an exceedingly tiresome, fidgety, thankless old creature.

He was generally presented with a back view of her hat, but once or twice he caught a glimpse of Miss Yaldwin's profile.

It was a very nice profile indeed, with sharply-cut features and short upper lip. The expression of the face when in repose was wistful and abstracted, with something of austerity in its purity. Life was evidently a serious business to its owner, and undoubtedly offered her more cares than pleasures. The sermon was followed by a hymn and the usual collection. In picking up her grandmother's spectacles, the miserable girl in the next pew contrived to let fall a coin, which rolled along the floor right out into the aisle, where it spun and then subsided with a vulgar coppery clang, as if determined that every one should hear it proclaim: "I am an honest penny." The culprit became scarlet as she met her grandfather's eye, and so pitiably nervous that she nearly let fall the alms bag.

"*Idiot!*" hissed the general as he snatched it out of her shaking hand and ostentatiously put in half-a-crown. "If you can only behave like a charity school girl, you had better stay at home."

Roger had been a deeply-interested witness of all this by-play and observed the scene over the top of his hymn-book, whilst his aunt, with a most sanctified expression, sang lustily beside him, indifferent to everything but the sound of her own voice.

As soon as people began to move, the general's hat was politely restored to him and he put his hand upon his pew door and stood up to depart. Roger rose also, and he and his relatives filed forth slowly in the wake of their neighbours. At last they were fairly outside the edifice, and Captain Hope saw Miss Yaldwin face to face in broad daylight. Was she pretty? Yes, as pretty as it was possible to be, considering her dowdy dress. Purple-grey eyes, delicate features and a perfect complexion. She was busily opening her grandmother's parasol and did not appear aware of his presence. Mrs. Baggot, who had exchanged genial greetings with the party, now presented Roger to the general and then walked home between the two men, leaving the three ladies to bring up the rear. General Yaldwin was notoriously gracious to strangers, truly *joie de rue, douleur de maison*, and received the young officer most cordially.

"So his regiment was in India—and how much leave had they given him?"

"Six months; he expected to be recalled at any time."

"And his regiment was quartered at Tilhar, was it not?

Capital station, thirty years ago; he had been there himself. Great changes, no doubt. Was the club where it used to be in the civil lines?—and what about the new railway? It was all dâk in his day. What about the pig-sticking club?"

General Yaldwin was secretly sorry when Mrs. Baggot came to a halt at No. 15 and he could no longer continue this interesting cross-examination. Roger lingered for a second, in hopes that he would be introduced to Mrs. and Miss Yaldwin; but no, the old warrior opened his own gate with a clang and drove his women-folk in before him—first the tottering old lady and then the girl, laden with books, air-cushion and trumpet.

* * * * *

"Roger, you nearly made me laugh out loud in church," said his aunt as they sat at luncheon. "That would have been a nice scandal. I never had such difficulty in keeping my countenance! You actually took away the general's hat and left him gasping with amazement—such a liberty has never been offered him. And you did it so coolly and with such an air of delicious innocence—you were nearly the death of me."

"What was he to do with his hat? He was not going to send it round, and as I concluded that he did not wish to sit on it, I took it away."

"Sit on it! What a profane idea! You could not have noticed it—his hats are one of his hobbies and are almost sacred."

"Well, they are a harmless and inexpensive craze," said the young man cheerfully.

"Yes, in moderation," remarked Annie, looking up from her plate; "but he has quite a collection and keeps them in a glazed cupboard in his study. He exhibited them to me one day as a great favour. I think he must have at least twenty."

"There must be something dangerous in a quantity of hats, or why do people say 'as mad as a hatter?'"

"The general is as sane as I am," remarked Mrs. Baggot, "though he spends hours brushing and ironing his hats. He has his garden hat, his every day hat, his wet day hat, his hat for going down to the club and his hat for running up to town."

"Oh, so he does go up to town?"

"Yes, but rarely—too rarely to please his family—only now

and then on business. Most of his time he spends in his study, reading the army lists and the money markets."

"But I conclude he goes to the club, since he has a club hat."

"Oh, yes; he patronizes it occasionally. He used to play whist regularly, but no one will make up a rubber with him now. His language is, to say the least of it, emphatic, and his temper extremely precarious—he does not like to lose."

"I don't know any one that does," rejoined Roger as he rose from the table.

After tiffin, as she called it, Mrs. Baggot went to her room to lie down—"a good old Indian custom," she declared—and Roger and his cousin set out for a walk.

It was a most tempting September afternoon, and, as the former expressed it, "a mortal sin to stay indoors." As they passed No. 13 they each cast a glance into the far bow window and there descried a forlorn-looking figure, bent a little forward, resting her chin on her hands and watching passers-by with wistful eyes.

"*She* won't get out again to-day," observed Annie emphatically.

"And what will she do with herself all this long afternoon—sit there?" asked her cousin.

"Oh, no; the old lady sleeps after lunch, and he smokes and writes worrying letters in his study—I mean, letters to worry other people."

"A nice amiable Sabbath occupation. And then?"

"Oh, about four o'clock, Rose will make the old lady's tea, and read sermons to him till dinner-time; after that festive meal, she will put her grandmother to bed and retire herself; not a pleasant life for a girl of nineteen—I am fond of Rose and sorry for her."

"Then why does not your grief and affection take some practical shape? Why don't you break her chains and ask her to go for a walk now and then? Happy thought!" Suddenly halting, he added, "What do you say; shall we go back and ask her to come out *now?*"

"No, no," rejoined Annie; "it could not be done to-day; there would have to be quite a formal arrangement, and asking for leave, that would not be managed under a week. I do what

I can, and that is but little. My mother is a great person for non-interference in other people's affairs; she pities Rose as much as I do; but she thinks that if we took her part and had a row with the general, she would lose her whist."

"Lose her whist? What do you mean?"

"You see she is devoted to whist, and so is he; twice a week he comes in regularly and plays from nine till eleven."

"Double dummy—what maddening excitement!"

"Not at all. I take a hand always, and am crushed by both, and now you will have to make a fourth."

"Thank you, and you say that the old gentleman's temper is precarious."

"Yes. I believe he threw his cards at Colonel Waddilove one night at the club, but he is never so violent in a private house, at least, not in ours; but besides the whist, mother and the general have other things in common. The same man does up their garden, they always engage the same fly, they exchange papers, indeed, they share some. Mother consults him about her investments, and they mutually borrow stamps, soda water and step-ladders. It would not be convenient to quarrel, you see."

"Yes; but I cannot see why you may not borrow the granddaughter as well as the stamps and soda water."

"When you know the general, you will easily comprehend why *not*," rejoined Annie impressively. "He scarcely ever lets her out of his sight, and only to us; and we rarely see her when Clara is at home; she and Clara do not coalesce."

"Indeed, and why is that?"

"Because Clara cannot (as she says) be bothered with girls; they are so bread-and-buttery, she declares, and she thinks Rose has a spice of the family temper and does not like her."

"And Miss Yaldwin reciprocates the sentiment, I conclude," said Roger briskly.

"Yes; she hates being patronized, and certainly Clara *has* a wonderful knack of rubbing her up the wrong way."

"I see," nodding his head. "I wonder if she will rub me up the wrong way?"

"Oh, no, quite the reverse; she will stroke you down nicely; she always gets on with men—that is, with most men."

"I notice that you have made some mental reservation," he exclaimed with a smile.

"I have," replied Annie, who was thinking that her sister's late husband was one of the exceptions—a rather important exception!

"I must say that I consider it cruelty to animals to keep a girl mewed up in the house this glorious day," said Roger, harking back to their original topic. "Suppose you ask Miss Yaldwin to go for a walk to-morrow?"

"A walk with me alone?" inquired his cousin demurely.

"Certainly, if you prefer it. I shall not intrude."

"Oh, you may intrude, as you call it, if she comes; you seem to take a great interest in her, Roger."

"Interest is too strong a word. I am sorry for her. You appear to forget how your mother worked upon my feelings last night. Yes, I am *very* sorry for her. With her face pressed against the window just now, she looked to me like a wild bird in a cage."

"You are becoming quite poetic," remarked Miss Baggot, rather irritably. "Would you be so very sorry if she were not so pretty? Come, now, tell me the honest truth."

And she gazed at him searchingly with a pair of ugly but sharp little eyes.

"If *I* am a poet, then you are a cynic, my fair cousin; but in answer to your question, I say, that I believe I would; I cannot be positively certain."

"Do you think her so very pretty?"

"I do; to that query I am able to give a decided reply."

After a silence of some minutes, she exclaimed:

"We seem to be always talking of our next-door neighbours, as if they were the only people in the world. Just come across the road with me, Roger, and I will introduce you to the four Miss Strattons."

(*To be continued.*)

In the Meuse Valley.

In travelling between Brussels and Namur, one is apt to scoff at the needle-stemmed pines of which here and there extensive plantations may be seen. They are such very thin-waisted things. It seems as if a man with a scythe might go through the patch and lay it low with as little effort as if the trees were of straw. But our Belgian cousins know what they are about. They set these plantations for hop poles; and a very lucrative investment they are said to be. This is not a land in which nature is allowed to run riot. Big forest trees and profligate hedges may do very well for more spacious countries, but they do not suit Belgium. Here the cultivator expects every square yard of his estate to render an account of itself.

I reached Namur late on Saturday afternoon, and was immediately impressed by its situation and gay appearance. For its size it is extremely well provided with shops. To be sure it lies in a hole; but then it is such an attractive hole. The hills of the Sambre and Meuse basins come tolerably close to these rivers where they meet, and Namur is built round their point of contact. A huge cliff peninsula rises between the two rivers, and towers over the church spires and roofs of the town. This, of course, is the citadel. It is as complete a site for a citadel as could well be found anywhere. A gunner without sympathy might enjoy himself in smashing the town to pieces from the top of the rock. About two thousand years ago the Aduatici much valued Namur. It must have been thoroughly impregnable in those days.

Having climbed to the summit of this cliff, I stayed on it until the sun went misty red behind the western hills. Then the clammy air wrapped me round with emphatic witness to the water in the neighbourhood; and, having seen enough of the abandoned fortifications at the back of the modern citadel, with their huge embankments, deep moats, drawbridges and so forth given into the hands of weeds and flowers and ochre-coloured slugs, I dropped down into the town on the Sambre side of the hill and found the Namur housewives and domestics excitedly

washing their doorsteps and as much of the public pavement as they were responsible for. This very vigorous course of municipal ablutions lasted the rest of the day. Even at half-past ten o'clock I found it still in earnest progress. Stolid citizens, with china-bowled pipes in their mouths, were at that late hour to be seen standing at their doors, surrounded by wife and children, watching the blue-gowned domestic (her gown tucked high) cast bucket after bucket of water upon the adjacent stones. A man had to carry all his wits with him to keep from being washed or besomed into the gutter by these good people of Namur.

Of other excitement the night here was not prolific. The cafés held a few sober revellers, and from a certain humble house with windows looking forth upon the Sambre, proceeded strains of music and the sound of dancing. One could even see the dancers. The men danced with their hats on, and now and again one of them executed a *pas seul* with a lady in his arms. The stamping of applause echoed up the river valley between the houses with strange effect. Save for this low species of ball, Namur seemed content to be without positive diversion. And when every door-step was spotless the citizens put up their shutters, hiding gingerbread and *articles de pêche* (apparently, with cutlery, the chief products of the town), and retired to bed, in joyful expectation of the festival of Sunday.

Of the dawn of this festival I had early warning. My bedroom looked upon a spacious square in front of the handsome railway station. Towards six o'clock, certain bands of tourists assembled here and hailed the day with string instruments and the flutter of flags. It was a delicate, sinuous kind of music, and kept me agreeably between sleeping and waking while it lasted. Then I, too, arose and at half-past seven was in the Namur streets, knapsack on back, with an uncertain sky overhead, which I hoped might withhold its rain until I had walked to Dinant, about eighteen miles to the south.

The Namur churches were full of worshippers as I passed them. In one the crowd had overflowed several yards, and a number of people with composed faces and mass books followed the service by instinct. Hard by was a sort of Sabbath old clothes market and arrangement of fruit stalls. It was odd, yet not displeasing, to see the unconscious blending of worshippers and vendors thus in the open air. When the altar bell rang, the former went de-

voutly on their knees (with full faith in the cleanliness of the flagstones); the others, however, continued their huckstering.

In the suburbs, too, along the banks of the broad placid Meuse, my unvarying companion for the day, half the world seemed hurrying to church. The ladies uniformly wore black, and the younger girls had such shiny faces that I could not but conjecture they had risen a little late, been washed by their mothers in a pet, and insufficiently towelled afterwards. Everywhere I heard the ringing of church bells. It was enough to make me think myself an unmitigated heathen.

At least it might have been had I not also seen many other mortals upon whom the alluring tintinnabulation had as little positive effect as it had upon me. The Belgian men—sad pagans—sat at their doors in their shirt-sleeves and read papers like the *Petit Journal Illustré;* their womenfolk passed them by and crossed the little garden patch of sweet mignonette and dahlias with their books in their hands; their lords were content to sit at their ease, smoking the perfumed pipe, with the balmy morning air caressing them and the beauty of the Meuse valley before them.

By the river side too were a multitude of others who resisted the seduction of the church bells. These were of the patient army of anglers; they comprised men of all ages, boys and girls and little children. In their blue smocks and with tousled hair they sat holding twenty-foot rods and staring fixedly at the tiny float upon which their fond hopes centred. They were the vanguard of the greater host with whom I made acquaintance ere I set foot in Dinant. There was not a quarter of a mile of the river that had not its dozen or score of fanatics. Some were here with their families, and each held a rod. But towards noon, when Nature relaxes a little, I found them lying prone on the banks in easy slumber. One old man in this attitude especially interested me. He was a smart little gentleman with a nice shapely stomach, and he lay straight on his back, as if he were about to be entombed, with his hands folded across his waistcoat and half his face covered by a red silk handerchief. His head was pillowed upon an air-cushion; by his side reposed a large bottle—empty; elsewhere a litter of egg-shells and ham and bread proclaimed that he had lunched; and his line was still in the water. But the float was rigid, and I felt a firm conviction that he had caught

nothing all the morning, that he would catch nothing all the day, and that, in short, he was accustomed so to spend his Sundays in catching nothing.

Ere sunset I saw but one more eccentric spectacle than this little gentleman. This one was a pathetic-looking lean white bitch, which squatted with an air of irremediable woe at a door-step and allowed her puppies to breakfast off her, while at the same time an impudent tame magpie walked round and round her, like a horse dealer inspecting a horse, now and again snatching a flea from her poor coat.

It is a cheerful, well-to-do district, this valley of the Meuse above Namur. The hills press the river closely in places. Their limestone steeps leave but little room for a road. And even when they recede and carry their wooded crests a mile away, it is only to give space for a snug village of white cottages and orchards, the cottage walls golden with ripe apricots or radiant with flowers, and the skirts of the village a fair slope of yellow and bronze, telling of the grain now ready for the sickle.

As for the people, they do not vary very much. The women after a certain time of life appear to have a woful disregard of the line of beauty. They become tub-shaped almost without exception. Granted that this is an indication of their physical well-being, it is not, however, the less melancholy from an æsthetic standpoint. The men are more comely. In their loose black caps they are a trifle sombre; but they are a genial community—when not engaged in the farce of fishing. The children are of course the most winsome of all the inhabitants. Their blue eyes, flaxen pigtails and infantine sturdiness commend them to the heart of the stranger, even as their gentle salutations and courtesies make him notice them.

This high road between Namur and Dinant cannot be said to afford very much satisfaction to the man who pines for solitude. I suppose no high road in Belgium can pretend to do this. But here in particular I had excellent opportunity of studies in human nature—at least, in its more superficial phases. Cyclists, pedestrian tourists, gentlemen in hired carriages and equestrians succeeded each other in brisk panoramic fashion. The Meuse valley is evidently in high repute on the Continent.

Of these various mortals the cyclists seemed to suffer most. It was a stuffy day until the rain came. The exertion of working

their treadles was therefore considerable. They sped by with streaming faces and shirts ingenuously open—exemplary pictures of the modern man in chains to a scientific invention. I, on my legs, kept sufficiently cool, and was under no furious impulse to cover so many miles in so many hours. But these poor fellows all went as if the fiend was behind them, and likely to catch them up if they abated anything of the pace at which they were going.

Twice, too, I collided with an elegant group of youthful Germans on a holiday of self-improvement. They were of both sexes. The girls wore skirts of a convenient brevity for walking; and they and the youths alike were girt with new satchels, to which they periodically transferred rocks and plants which were so unfortunate as to catch their eyes and excite their admiration. Presiding over one of these companies were a professor and his wife. I have not the least doubt he was a professor, and so I give him the title at venture. Of course, too, the lady could not but be his wife. The dear, thoughtful gentleman, in addition to being strung with sundry tin boxes for specimens, sandwiches and instruments, carried an alpenstock and a green umbrella. His face wore a placid fixed smile as he went from one to another of his young charges when these were rummaging in the hedgerows or peering about the rocks. Their enthusiasm seemed to enchant him and he too showed the high spirits of a child.

"Behold! monsieur," cried one observant little lad, "the water which descends," and he pointed elatedly to a tiny trickle of moisture down the rock side.

Whereupon Mrs. Professor and the others hastened to share the discovery, and to listen with respectful interest while the old gentleman explained that there was either a spring or a pool above; that in no other way could the presence of water in such a place be accounted for.

By Profondeville the river makes a considerable bend, and for a mile or two the cottages are continuous. One remarks how numerous are the little wayside refreshment houses. Almost every other house seems to carry the bush over its door. But it is a deceptive sign. In spite of the advertisement there may be nothing drinkable within the house. For example, where I entered at hazard, I discovered a woman and a baby and a single bottle of red syrup, known as cassis; coffee, wine and beer were all lacking. The poor woman was delighted to serve me

with a glass of cassis at a halfpenny. Her baby showed such demonstrative affection for me that I presented it with the price of a second glass of the stuff—a benefaction which gained for me many expressions of gratitude from the mother. I do not think I can recommend this beverage to the general public. It has a taking ruby colour—but that said, all that can be said in its favour is said. Our friends across the water are masterful in the discovery of insipid liquours with fine names; many of them have not, I believe, even the poor quality of being able to inebriate.

After Profondeville I stepped on briskly, more and more mistrustful of the sky. This suspicion was fully justified near Rouillon, where the cliffs on the right bank of the river are precipitous and picturesque. A fair was in progress in the village; the children were patrolling in pasteboard spectacles, and blowing painful music out of tin trumpets. In the vicinity, too, I met half a score of the young people of the village, the girls in white and bareheaded, arm-in-arm, and looking so happy that I envied them the well-prepared meal to which they were returning. I had, I was sure, enjoyed the savour of it as I had passed one house more imposing than the rest.

But here the rain began to come down, and I felt somewhat less regard for the sober Meuse by my side. Even the stir of anticipation among the anglers did not reconcile me to the probability of a soaking. One of these gentlemen proclaimed to all the world, with an intense nervous excitement, that he had a bite. In a moment there was a rush to see the issue. But there was no issue worth mentioning. The fish had eaten the worm—that was all. The angler said, "*Sacré!*" and something even worse, and with trembling fingers selected a new worm. I have little doubt the Meuse fish later enjoyed this also, and did not suffer either in body or mind for the indulgence.

I had to shelter for a time under the thick trees of the woodland of a neighbouring château. Here I was joined by the most dismal party of professional tramps I think I ever met. They had a dilapidated residential van of the common kind, and a sort of basement room slung underneath. In this lower chamber lay the children of the establishment, thin, tattered, sickly little mortals, tossing among the dirty straw of their bed. The master drew one of them forth as if it were a puppy far back in its kennel, and then, in acknowledgment of a furious fit of coughing which seized

the little fellow, forced some red mixture down the lad's reluctant throat.

The coughing lad served as a pretext for a request for alms, but I was not won by the appearance of the lord and lady of this itinerant castle. Either the sun had ill-used their noses, or they were a pair of rogues very far gone in the way of all drunkards. Moreover, they trailed behind their van a deplorable wreck of a horse, the sight of which made my blood boil. If you can imagine a horse with a back like a dromedary, you may imagine the terrible load to which this poor misshapen quadruped had been wedded from its youth ; its backbone was in fact bent like a pothook.

I preferred to plod on in the rain rather than endure such society under the trees ; and I continued so to plod until the bridge of Yvoir appeared in front, and hopes of luncheon and a brief rest came to me. Not long before a steamer weighted with happy Namur folk had stolen past me towards Dinant. I should suppose there was not standing room for one left unoccupied on the deck of this boat, yet the voyagers sang loud songs while they moved up stream, and shouted in unison under the limestone crags to awake the astonished echoes that abide in such spots. The Meuse is made navigable in this way, and for the great barges of merchandise which ascend from its mouth, by a series of locks, which do not, however, disfigure the stream, being arranged unobtrusively here and there by the shore. The Namur tourists had cheered the boat strenuously as it rose to the new level in one of these sluices, and ended with a unanimous "Hip, hip!" as it moved onward at about four miles and a half per hour.

I could not get much to eat at Yvoir, as it was past dinner time. But a dry cigar proved as good as a meal. I flatter myself I increased the stock of useful knowledge in this little village at the head of a lateral glen from the Meuse. My host cooked a species of beefsteak for me and served it up red as a tomato. I signified my dissatisfaction, and then in response to an eager question if it was not precisely thus that a beefsteak *à l'anglaise* ought to be cooked, I said "No," emphatically. It is hardly marvellous that the more refined people of Europe feel an instinctive horror at the idea of living and eating in England, when our beefsteaks are thus misconceived throughout the length and breadth of the Continent. I have seen a beardless Italian attempting to eat a piece of beef as raw as the steaks which were served to

Abyssinian Bruce a hundred years ago, simply and solely because he considered it *chic* to be as English as possible. The effect of raw beef upon the Italian, or indeed any other, temperament cannot but be bad.

About five miles from Yvoir, away from the high road to Dinant, is the reputable ruined Castle of Montaigle. I had heard much of this ruin, and resolved in spite of the weather to see it. Accordingly, I left the Meuse for a time, and followed its tributary the Floye for a wet hour and a half.

At first this little stream does not please. Near its junction with the Meuse it is shallow and muddy, and with nothing of beauty about it. Then it may be traced across a broad plain upon which many cattle feed, and followed into the agreeable wooded glen which in the old times the Castle of Montaigle controlled. This glen was pretty enough even in a searching downpour; on a fine summer's day it must be distinctly charming. The river grows more and more pellucid; its meanderings amid pocket meadows, here open to the heavens and there closely fenced in with trees, soon endear it to one's affection, and the occasional notice boards prohibiting indiscriminate angling seem effectually to confirm one's belief that it is a trout stream of quality. The woods fall steeply into the glen, a brake of hazel, mountain ash and alders, interwoven with ivy and bramble and clematis. Of nuts here the harvest must be very great, and especially bountiful, considering that the glen is almost uninhabited.

For a few minutes in the midst of the rain I found shelter in the isolated house of a lead miner. The miner was not at home, but his pretty dark-eyed young wife was, and so was his baby boy, who screamed at me as if I were an ogre. Here I drank coffee and was allowed to smoke a cigarette. My hostess spoke a most confounding *patois*, which puzzled me almost as much as Chinese. But eyes can talk as well as tongues, and our plight was not so very lamentable. She had neither milk nor sugar in the house, little indeed except her baby boy; but her hot coffee was nevertheless a useful antidote against the rain, which had got to my skin.

Then for a long hour I toiled up the valley of the Floye, with the stream and nothing but the stream for companion. Stay, the ochre-coloured slugs deserve notice. I have already mentioned these residents in the Meuse valley, but here by the Floye

they were a dazzling sight fresh washed by the rain. Some were four or five inches long, and symmetrically broad in the back. I take credit to myself, considering the numbers that intervened betwixt me and Montaigle, that I avoided setting my foot upon a single one.

At length, at a bend in the stream and a twist in the valley, a castellated pile stood across from side to side of the glen like an insurmountable *chevaux de frise.* From this aspect it seemed to close the valley, and an extremely effective *cul de sac* it appeared, with its jagged walls, broken towers and frayed battlements, all thickly clad with ivy, and with trees growing from the very chambers of the ruin. Anon, however, its true situation was declared. It is built on a peninsula formed by the Floye, and commands a reach of the valley beyond, even as below towards Yvoir. In its day it must have been both a safe and formidable place of residence. It is said to be the finest existing ruin of its kind in the kingdom, and I can well believe it, though the more modern pile of Bouillon, near the frontier by Sedan, is more extensive, and even bolder in situation.

I hoped to find Montaigle supreme in solitude, even as the Floye valley had been. But it was not. At its steep base half-a-dozen red houses nestled amid trees and lush meadows. There was even a sign of local industry in the yard littered with stone-ware, through which the ruin was approached, and high over the castle, on the western side of the glen, were the stout buildings of a homestead, which seemed strong enough to stand a siege.

Worst of all, there was a railway and a station for Montaigle. It is quite a new line and has been cut in the rocks and carried across the river in many places by shapely bridges; but it has robbed Montaigle of the charm it held ere the first locomotive whistled towards its nerveless walls and deserted halls. A year or so ago you might come hither and rely upon being in congenial peace, alone with the purling stream, the chatter of jackdaws and (a trivial distraction!) the homely voices of the two or three villagers below pottering about in their gardens. But now the train puts tourists of Namur and Dinant in easy touch with it, and the trail of the sandwich paper has begun. In a quiet way, however, even now I can fancy few more delightful feats of *villegiatura* than a residence in one of these Montaigle cottages for a week or two, with or without a companion, but with plenty of books, to-

bacco, a mind at ease and a fishing-rod. I had ere this seen the trout leaping at the flies of the glen, and it seemed not unlikely that the Floye might offer as good sport as the Devonshire Teign.

There is another castle up this pretty glen of the Floye, that of Poilvache. But I had no time to give to it. Montaigle contented me. And so I retraced my steps among the nut bushes as fast as I could, and towards five o'clock again found myself on the high road to Dinant. By the way, there is food for powder as well as for artificial flies in the Floye valley. At the head of the recess, by the Warnant railway station, may be seen a pretty little hunting châlet, in which probably a stranger would be received *en pension* for something trivial per diem. Its fantastic design of wood and plaster, with stucco heads on its façade, and its red roof, have a good appearance in the greenery. Sundry long fishing-rods resting in the balcony told of the pleasure to which the house may be said to be consecrated. The figure of S. Hubert was even more informing.

The weather was now kind for the rest of the day, and my long walk came to an end in brilliant evening sunshine. The paling light on the spacious meadows by Moulins, and the gentle drying wind across the bronzing grain, were worth being soaked for. Even here, though somewhat weary of foot, I felt no envy of the frenzied Teutons who continued to pass me on velocipedes, bareheaded and perspiring. They, poor fellows, did not seem able so much as to lift their eyes to see the crimson flush on the limestone braes upon the opposite side of the Meuse. Their attention was concentrated upon the road before them and their rivals in misery and speed.

At the village of Moulins I joined in a pleasant little festival. A booth had been built outside the church, and herein a prize distribution was in progress. It was an affair strictly parochial, for the curé himself—or his deputy in orders—handed forth the dolls and the trumpets with congratulatory smiles. Within the church, too, something out of the common had evidently happened. For this, however, I was too late. Only the female sacristan—a woman as tub-shaped as any of her country folk—remained in the building. This good soul, when she espied me, approached the door and devoutly fell on her knees with folded hands where she could not but intercept me at my departure. But I gave her nothing. And when I looked back I found that she had hastily

risen from her knees, and bore as unamiable an expression upon her face as may consist with a double chin and an unwieldy body. I have no notion of putting myself in bonds of voluntary servitude to such people. If there be any truth in them, they ought to find prodigious soul comfort in the mere performance of their holy offices. I would give money to a rogue of a tramp where I would refuse it to a sacristan.

From the church and the vicinity of the enchanted children I passed into the broad plain by the Meuse, with the usual slips of poplars in monotonous succession by the roadside. This hour of the day was as pleasant as any of its forerunners. Nature seemed to take heart after the rain. A lark, misled by the springlike freshness of the air, soared from a potato field, and sang a dulcet lay overhead. There were kine in the meadows, and they began to low melodiously as if they desired the milkmaids' attentions. But the milkmaids had other claims upon their regards.

I encountered one of these damsels by the trunk of a poplar tree. She was holding a chain to which two cows were bound at the horns. But she was not engrossed by the fair dappled quadrupeds, who cast large wondering eyes at her. Instead of leading them into the dairy yard, she divided her smiles between two young men in high black calico caps, who appeared to be at discord with each other. She was a girl with a passable share of beauty, and was not unaware of her endowment. Her trim ankle came from and went under her cerulean skirt with tantalizing incertitude as she leaned against the poplar, and used her laughing blue eyes upon her swains with hateful impartiality.

Nor was this girl alone on the sunlit flat in her iniquitous coquetry. When I had passed her a couple of furlongs I came upon an agitated band of young men following two other damsels at a close but respectful distance. The girls walked arm-in-arm, and their alluring yellow pigtails swayed gently before the eyes of the youths. A ripple of quiet laughter drifted upon the air in their wake, and seemed in a measure to perplex or discourage their followers, who lacked the assurance of town-bred lads, and did not appear deeply versed in the female heart.

But lo! from a side lane who should appear upon the scene but the curé himself, with upraised head and tranquil face, as if he too were inhaling gratefully the invigorating evening air. He took

his young parishioners in flank. Had he been a mean man or an ascetic, unable to sympathize with the common aspirations of his flock, he might have looked reproof and gone on his way in the belief that he had effectually chilled the romance in the souls of these young people. But he was an excellent, sensible priest. He did but hold up a forefinger, smile in a saintly way at the maidens, and whisper something like, "*Fie, mes enfants,*" as he strode honestly past the lads. I had no time to watch this scene develop, but I fancy the blue-eyed girls would be the first to turn on the plea of fatigue. Then the young men might have their innings.

Hereabouts, where the left bank of the Meuse again presses the river in low rocky walls, I left the sunlight. This shone on the cliffs of the right bank for a little while longer and transfigured them. I, however, was in humid shade. The road too was of a slippery viscid material. So it continued to be until I had passed Bouvigne, over which a fragment of a ruined castle broods impressively. To the last, and even when the Dinant rock was close at hand, I could see the untiring anglers in serried ranks by the river side. They might have been taken for dummies had not a breeze down the stream blown into their blue jackets, and for a moment or two puffed them like toads.

Dinant is almost as well known to English people as Malvern or Matlock. I will not, therefore, attempt to sketch its singular beauties. The rock, 350 feet perpendicular, with a citadel on its summit, rises from the river edge in the middle of the town. The cathedral side by side with it soars about half as high as the rock, and the jackdaws hover between the weathercock of the one and the white sheer face of the other, indeterminate (like the visitor), which fascinates the more. After the rock and the cathedral I suppose the Dinant gingerbread ought to rank. It is certainly very nice, and the Dinant confectioners wrest it into all manner of eyrie and artistic devices.

So full of my travelling country folk was the town that the courtly proprietor of the Hôtel des Postes could not do more than allow me to eat my supper in his house. He procured a bed for me, however, in the establishment of a painter and glazier hard by. I could have filled my knapsack with sponges and paint brushes had I been so minded—not to speak of wall papers and tin cases of colours. But there was a large dog in the glazier's

yard, which howled through the night and put me out of humour with my lodgings.

At the supper table the English style of beauty prevailed. For my part, I am never quite sure of its pre-eminence over other styles of beauty unless I see the several types in juxtaposition. To the stranger our fair are certainly apt to prove themselves chilling, and beauty is of manners as well as features. But at a Continental *table d'hôte* this superb indifference does not seem out of place. It is difficult and even ungraceful to show extraordinary vivacity and to eat soup at the same time. Hence the dark-blue eyes and the adamantine iciness of my countrywomen here at Dinant did not seem disagreeably absurd. Certain young Frenchmen tried their civil blandishments upon these ladies; but they might as well have made advances to the moon. About ten English clergymen were at table with us. This may have had a more than common restraining influence upon our English ladies.

There was a fair in Dinant this night, and into the midst of it I went with a cigar when supper was at an end. The glare of its lamps and gas jets caught in the still waters of the Meuse, and so did the lights from the old bridge of the town. Discords indescribable broke upon the night air from the bands and mechanical orchestras of the itinerant showmen. It was rather a wicked fair. There were at least sixteen roulette tables to it. These were not all concerned with the winning of money. You might gain a Swiss clock, a toothbrush, or a baby's rattle at certain of them. I suppose there is a great difference between winning a napoleon and a piece of furniture the worth of a napoleon. A certain genial English vicar led his wife into this scene of revelry, and invested half-a-franc upon a domestic roulette. I never saw woman so humbled as when the latter won an article of crockery which it would have embarrassed her to claim. Her husband, wicked fellow, laughed as heartily as any; but they both discreetly withdrew the next moment. If any of their friends had beheld them, the tale would have never died from the parish.

Among the shows were two or three hard to resist. One was the Great Temptation of St. Antony, with a very ill-done canvas outside. But when I ascertained that this was contrived in almost utter darkness (no doubt to symbolize the anchorite's

cave), I stifled my desire in this particular. It did not seem worth while to subject one's pocket to the risks it would incur under such conditions.

In another show, for twenty centimes, the mysteries of the nether world were declared with forcible illustrations. There was a great crush here. The Dinant country folks ought to have known better, but they seemed to regard the show as a huge jest. Even the words, "*Ad majorem Satani gloriam*," over the proscenium, did not sober them. Nor when a girl in flame-coloured tights and a face painted *à la* Mephistopheles appeared with a forked rod and began to harangue the platform about sin and its penalties, even then they did not stay their levity.

The curtain rose and disclosed an arrangement of cardboard imps and demons with impossible heads and pitchforks, red-hot irons and so forth in their hands. The flame-coloured girl waxed eloquent. Then, one after the other, the cardboard sinners marched to judgment. They stood trembling before the throne of the arch fiend, a ghoul whose teeth chattered with terrible joy at sight of them, while the girl told us their offences, and then gave them over to the damnation they deserved. A lawyer, a miser, a milkmaid who adulterated the milk, a greengrocer who used false measures, an astronomer, a hypocritical priest, a soldier, an aristocrat, and others tottered before us, heard their iniquitous history retold, and were then each in turn tossed into the pit by two officious demons. Some of the victims described a somersault *en route*. Then there was a burst of flame from the pit. The demons stirred the flames maliciously with a long pole, showing their teeth the while, until the sinner was, it is to be presumed, sufficiently carbonized for his crimes.

This show ended with a brief portrayal of paradise. But paradise was a dismal farce here; for the scenery of hell was made to do part duty for it. And afterwards we went our way, I hope duly impressed by the fate of the arrogant astronomer and the milkmaid who mixed water with the milk.

A plague of large flies with white wings came upon Dinant during its fair. It was hideous to see the immolation to which they surrendered themselves in the gas jets and lamps of the booths. Elsewhere the showmen swept them away in piles. The roulette tables alone were responsible for the death of tens of thousands. They lay on the ground like snow in places; but

they were powerless to invade the houses, the doors and windows of which were kept scrupulously shut. They did not, therefore, interfere with my slumber among the paint-pots and wall-papers.

The next day I rose early and climbed the citadel steps before setting out for Givet to the south. But the days of Dinant's prowess seem to be over. Instead of modern improvements and big guns, I found merely a museum of old weapons and empty rock chambers. One thing more deserves to be noticed: you may behold the gig of Madame de Maintenon in this lofty place. It ought to be an eloquent relic, but its sepulchre is cold and vault-like, and I had no time to devote to it. Still, I am glad to have seen even this poor memorial of the woman who in her youth once declared that the Book of Job and Rochefoucault's "Maximes" were her favourite reading, and who, as a king's mistress, could write like an apostle.

My second day in the Meuse valley was not satisfactory. The rain was altogether unkind. I will therefore say nothing about it, except that I was glad to cross the border and enter France by Givet. I saw a prodigious quantity of nuts and bullaces on the trees of the Ardennes where I traversed the forest, but I should have preferred a little sun to all the nuts and plums in the universe. As it was, I kept the rain of the Meuse valley upon me until I had been in France several hours.

CHARLES EDWARDES.

In an African Garden.

By the Author of "Mary Aylmer," &c.

On a golden afternoon in the month of February, 18—, the sun was shining down hotly upon the orange and lemon trees of an old garden in the interior of Morocco; the river, divided into channels for purposes of ablution, was flowing peacefully through the part where the shade was thickest, birds were singing, and the different members of the household were lotus eating, each in the fashion which pleased him best. Some had chosen rocking-chairs, others lay full length on a carpet spread over the tiles which surrounded the fountain, two were in hammocks slung by the water-side. It was a Bohemian household, as might be expected; the cook, white-robed and majestic, just in from the market, was leaning back in an arm-chair in the dining-room, exchanging confidences with a slave of the male gender, a splendid specimen, some six feet high, as black as ebony, and especially told off as nurse to the baby, who was contentedly holding on to his ear with a fat, white, dimpled hand. From the windows of the room there was a glorious view over the broad valley through which the river wandered, and in the background rose row after row of deep blue mountains, a white peak showing here and there in the far distance; the gray old city which lay at their feet was dotted with tall green minarets, from which the call to prayer resounded six times a day with unceasing regularity. It was a fanatical city, of course, and the presence of Christians was barely tolerated in its streets unless they assumed the flowing robes and picturesque garb of its rightful owners, or wore a foreign uniform; in the latter case they were feared as well as hated. How or why the household I am about to tell of came to be in its midst matters not to the story.

"Has it ever struck you, Charley," the young hostess was saying to her husband, "that it is rather an odd thing, even in Morocco, to shut a good-looking and unmarried girl of nineteen up in a garden, where, excepting myself, the only companions she is likely to have for the next three months are three un-

married men? It seems to me a proceeding likely to cause complications."

"Possibly. But I do not see how we are to help it; when we invited Molly we did not expect any one else but Monro this winter, and as I like you to have a girl to speak to, and we all seem very happy together, don't you think we had better let things take their course?"

"The manners and customs of the country are beginning to affect you, Charley. But we have undertaken a certain amount of responsibility in inviting Molly here. I love her dearly, and would not part with her on any account, but I can't help knowing that Captain Morland and Mr. Elton are always in attendance. I am only too thankful that as yet Major Monro has not entered the lists, but when General Nugent keeps writing such grateful letters about what he calls our kindness to his daughter, one feels, somehow, a little guilty sometimes."

"He knows they are staying with us; I told him. But the problem is too difficult for me to solve, my dear Marjory; I leave it to your wiser though younger head. No doubt, as you suggest, the materials for a very pretty kettle of fish do exist here just now. I am, however, going to fetch the baby."

"What has aroused your indignation, Mrs. Colville?" inquired a tall fair man, approaching her slowly. "In this climate excitement might be fatal. Can I be of any use?"

"It is past tea-time, and if you would ask Miss Nugent to come to me to consult over the means of getting it, I should be immensely obliged, Captain Morland."

He disappeared with unusual alacrity, the little lady noted, but then he was going to disturb a hated rival. Molly and Mr. Elton had been sitting together ever since lunch.

A bright girl with a very sweet expression came quickly up on hearing herself called.

"Tea, Marjory, did you say? Don't disturb yourself, Captain Morland and I will go and wake some of the people up."

After a while they reappeared, bearing cups and saucers and cake, one of the slaves following with the rest of the appointments; the others came up and seated themselves round their hostess. Mr. Colville remarked that he must ride over to a village some thirty miles away the next day, and would have to camp there for the night, returning the following morning.

Those who liked might ride part of the way with him, in fact two of them might come all the way to Ben Aouda—the place in question. He would take the usual armed escort, and three of them could go back with the ladies and whichever of their guests would take charge of them.

"Pray take care of yourself, Charley," said his wife. "I shall be very glad if some one will go all the way with you. I cannot endure your being left to the mercy of these men. I always expect something horrible will happen."

"All right. Then perhaps, Elton, you and Morland will come with me, and if Monro will go back with the ladies, I shall be awfully obliged. It is better for one of us to be here at night."

Each expressed his willingness to fall in with the plan, though Mrs. Colville announced that it was unlikely she would be of the party, as it might be too hot for the baby; besides, her "soul-ham"—the long cloak which entirely conceals the figure—had gone to be cleaned, and riding in European garments among so fanatical a people was not a desirable proceeding, though Molly would be able to go all the same.

Molly and Captain Morland strolled away together under the trees. Mrs. Colville looked slightly annoyed, and called her back on some transparent pretence. Molly saw through it, and turned with a smile to her companion, saying:

"Marjory is very anxious about my behaviour. I can see it by the way she looks at me. I wish I could do something to reassure her. If she only knew it, I have not the slightest intention of proposing to anybody."

Captain Morland looked slightly shocked. He was a good fellow, but rather apt to take people *au pied de la lettre*. If he had only had some slight sense of the ridiculous, he would have been so nice, Molly thought. As it was, it was one of her favourite distractions to say things to him which he thought unbefitting a woman.

"I am quite sure she never entertained such an idea for one moment," he replied seriously. "I wish she were not given to remarks like these," he was thinking to himself. "In every other respect she is exactly what a girl should be."

He was himself a most eligible *parti*, and most people would have thought it a pity that Molly did not try to please him a little more. But then they were in a country where girls were scarce.

Next day they all started for the proposed ride, with the exception of Mrs. Colville, who never cared much for such expeditions, and was not happy till her husband returned from them. It was a lovely morning and the riders set off in the highest spirits; even Major Monro, who as a rule never spoke, made a remark or two as to its beauty. They looked more like a travelling circus than anything else, Mrs. Colville thought, as she watched the little procession file through the gates, so picturesque in appearance, so prosaic in reality. Half a dozen soldiers, fully armed, rode in front of them. They halted for lunch towards mid-day, but at three o'clock Mr. Colville told Molly and the major it was time for them to set out for home, giving them many injunctions not to loiter by the way, as the city gates would be shut at six o'clock, and on no account to lose sight of their escort, for though their own get-up was unexceptionably Moorish, their speech would at once betray them if they met any parties out "on the raid." They promised obedience, and turned their horses' heads towards the sunset. About an hour afterwards they came up with a large party of horsemen, wild and savage-looking, armed with clubs, and their kaïd, magnificent in the richest attire, riding at their head. Molly held her cloak carefully over her eyes, the only part of her face visible, so as not to attract attention. The kaïd stopped one of the soldiers, and inquired if they were in charge of one of the sultan's ladies.

"Certainly," replied the man. "Do you not see her blue slippers?"

They passed on, and Mahmoud, the man addressed, told Major Monro that these were well-known robbers; he hoped that the Kaïd Colville would not fall in with them. He had himself, as the major knew, belonged once to the "hillmen," therefore was able to speak as to their identity. Just then a straggler came flying past them, and Molly's horse, which was occasionally somewhat restive, immediately started off in pursuit. To his horror, her companion saw the girl was being run away with; turning to the escort, he bade them ride slowly on while he went to fetch back the young lady. She had evidently lost all control of the excited animal, and was soon out of sight. When he regained the other side of the hill the mule-tracks suddenly divided, one leading down a deep ravine, the other

turning sharply and then ascending a mountain which appeared to be very steep. He had not an idea which she had taken, but decided to try the ravine, spurred his horse to its utmost speed, and caught her up just as the men were surrounding her, intending to prevent her turning back. He dismounted, and seizing her bridle, with his revolver in the other hand, turned the animal's head round. The hillmen seemed to hesitate for a moment, exchanged a few words with each other, and then, to his intense relief, rode on.

"Are you all right?" he inquired somewhat anxiously.

"Yes, thank you. I don't mind being run away with, but certainly those horrid-looking men were unpleasant."

The two horses began to fight, so he remounted. The soldiers were out of sight, but they had been told, as was usual, that they would have to answer for the life and safety of their charge with their heads, so they would not be very far off. He thought by ascending the mountain, instead of following the track, they could take a shorter cut, but when they reached the top they found themselves in a wide valley, and had, it was evident, mistaken the way.

"These places are so exactly like each other, and yet seem all to lead in widely different directions," he remarked at length. "That is the worst of a mountainous country without roads or paths."

Presently they came to a saint's tomb.

"We did not pass that this morning," said Molly. "If you recollect, the only tomb we came across was by the river, after we had forded it."

"True," he replied. "We must get up to the highest point we can find, and then we shall be able to see into the plain below, where our men must be waiting. It is very rough riding for you, though."

When they reached the summit of the hill they noticed two horsemen galloping quickly westwards.

"Those are none of our fellows, I know by the horses; besides, they have the long native guns. Well, we must make for the plain, anyhow."

He glanced at his watch; it was already five o'clock. Then it would be impossible for them to reach the city before the gates were closed, but he would not mention this new complication just

yet. Some fresh mule and camel tracks became visible; the sun had disappeared behind one of the peaks of the range which formed a huge wall on their right.

They were riding now through a cemetery; the heaps of stones at regular intervals indicated graves, consequently there must be a village not far off, and certainly there was no human habitation on the right route to F———; after rounding the edge of a cliff, they saw a group of mud huts thatched with brush below them. That they had lost their way was but too evident, and as he had this poor child with him, he dared not turn off into the village and inquire, even if he could have hoped to be understood. A horrible fear seized him that their escort had been set upon and maltreated, possibly worse, and there was, in that case, no doubt that they must pass the night as best they could out in the open. Some minutes' reflection convinced him that the best plan would be for them to wait for a short time at the top of the hill, where their soldiers could not fail to see them, if they were in search of them, and if they did not turn up, then to ride back to the saint's tomb, just below which was the tract which Mr. Colville and the others must follow on the next morning, when they would return from Ben Aouda. He communicated the first part of his resolution to Molly, who stopped her horse as he desired. Fortunately, they had had a long rest at mid-day and a good meal; the horses also had been watered and fed. No horsemen appeared in sight, however, though they waited patiently for some time. If he had only been alone! What was he to do with the girl at his side? She would get ill with the fatigue and the cold; moreover, it was getting dark and he must tell her.

"Molly," he said at last, quite unconscious that he had addressed her by her Christian name, "there is no doubt about it, we are benighted. I dare not take you into that village, neither could I make them understand that we want shelter, if I did. I think we must go back to that saint's tomb which we passed, if we can do it without being observed, tie up the horses to a tree, and make ourselves as comfortable as circumstances will permit us with our two saddles, waiting for the dawn. What a blessing that you have a shawl with you; my saddle-cloth will do for a carpet, and as I have my revolver, you need have no fear. I am sure you are tired out, and you will be able to rest at least." He

spoke as cheerfully as he could to reassure her, but in his own mind he felt many misgivings.

"You know best," she replied, and somehow with this strong, gentle-mannered man to take care of her the prospect did not seem so very alarming, after all, for she had been aware also for some time past that they could not reach home that night. "We shall not be disturbed in the darkness, because they are all afraid of their 'djins' at night."

"That's a brave girl; come along." They retraced their steps and soon gained the tomb he spoke of; both dismounted and, with the aid of the saddles and wraps, arranged two fairly comfortable seats. He fastened up the horses and then returned and placed himself at her side.

"I have a packet of biscuits which Marjory put inside my shawl," she remarked, "so we need not starve." Over the biscuits they became very friendly, and mindful of the long hours of probable wakefulness before them both, he thought the kindest thing he could do would be to try and make her talk to him; indeed he had long felt a desire to know Miss Nugent better, but as the other two men generally monopolized her and conversation was rather an effort to him, he had not, he thought, had the opportunity; he would improve it now.

"You know that your father and I were in the same regiment some years ago, about ten, I think; I must have seen you when you were a child?"

"Very likely. I have often heard him speak of you. What was that?" She seized his arm; the sound which was now audible to both of them was that of approaching footsteps. She rose to her feet and he did the same; the day had altogether been an exciting one for her, and the girl was tired out. He put his arm round her to steady and reassure her, and listened intently. It sounded as if some one had approached the tomb, thrown something down and departed. Major Monro feared the Arabs from the neighbouring village had come to steal the horses, and if they themselves should be discovered in the tomb it would be looked on as an attempt at sacrilege, and murder was likely to be the result. Nothing but plunder would bring these people out at nightfall. All was silent again.

"I must go out and see if the horses are there," he whispered

in her ear. "Will you come with me, or dare I leave you here? No one can come inside without my seeing them."

"Take me with you," she whispered back, "unless you think I had better stay ; I will if you say so."

"No, you shall come, but the moon is up, so take off your muslin veil and the cord which fastens down your hood ; pull the hood over your face as I do, and then by this light they cannot see you are not a boy, if you keep in the shadow of the wall of the tomb. Follow me as closely as you can."

He went cautiously out. But the horses were all safe, so far, and no human figure was to be seen ; something had been thrown down beside a prickly pear bush a short distance off, though. He signed to Molly to stand still where she was and went to look. It was a head! A murder had evidently been committed, an event too terribly common in that country even to excite remark, but the sight of the ghastly trophy struck him with peculiar horror under the circumstances. He feared it was one of their own escort ; anyhow, the child must not know. He returned to her and led the way back to the tomb.

"Had any one been up here, do you think?" she inquired anxiously.

"If so, they have evidently gone home again, and now we will settle down once more, only we must speak in whispers. If they return, they will then, if they overhear us, certainly think the 'djins' are about and give us a wide berth. I am going to take off my soulham and wrap it round you ; I am sure you are perished with cold."

"No, no. You would freeze without it, it is so thick, and I am really quite comfortable." Presently her head drooped, and he saw she had fallen asleep. That was best, and he drew her wraps more closely round her ; the tomb was built at the edge of a precipice, and no one could come up that way, so he could safely go out again and reconnoitre. Taking his revolver in his hand, he went back to the prickly pear bush to see if he could recognize the features of the murdered man ; one of their escort had been known to his host for many years, and for a Moor, was considered a trustworthy man, and would therefore be a great loss to them. But the cursory inspection, which was all he could bring himself to make, told nothing ; the features of the natives rarely showed any peculiarity in form or expression

by which they could be individually recognized; it was not a negro, that was all he could ascertain. Glancing back constantly at their temporary dwelling to see that no one came near, he went cautiously on to see that the horses were all right, but as a cloud suddenly hid the moon he did not linger, and returning to the door called Molly by name so as not to alarm her if she should be awake. No one answered, however, and he entered, feeling his way carefully in the obscurity. A sudden ray of moonlight illumined the place. Good God! she was not there!

He walked hastily round the white building, calling her name gently; there was no reply; unless she had been surprised and gagged with almost incredible quickness, and carried off during the few moments of comparative darkness, she must have awoke in his absence and followed him out. There was a hedge of prickly pear a little farther down the hill and some wild olive trees; the clouds still obscured the moon, but he managed to find his way about; there was no sign of life, however. After as thorough a search as it was possible to make, he recollected that the tomb overlooked a precipice, and that it was just possible some of the Arabs might have seen them enter and have concealed themselves below in order to surprise them, yet it had appeared in the dusky light after sunset when they first saw it to be too steep for any human being to climb. He approached the edge, and lying down, looked over and called her once more. He fancied he heard a faint reply, and decided to try and find an easier descent as soon as the clouds passed over; eventually he managed to scramble down, and finding a foothold, reached what he thought was the place whence the sound had come.

He heard his name called. There she was, seated on the ground about fifty paces off; a deep sense of relief came over him, and he went quickly on.

"I woke up after you left me," she said as he reached her; "and not liking to be alone, thought I would follow you. I could not see where I was going, and just as I thought I was safely out of reach of the edge of the cliff, I fell over it. I managed to catch hold of the bushes and so save myself from a bad fall. But I have twisted my foot. I am so sorry, for I am sure I have given you a bad fright."

"You did, indeed; but now I have found you, it is all right."

He raised her up, and after many vain attempts to walk, she consented to let him half carry, half drag her up the way he had come down, till they reached the tomb once more. He was full of admiration for the brave girl, who was evidently suffering much, yet would not complain; she was so much younger than he, less than half his age, and looked such a child as she leant back against the inside of her saddle, too tired almost to speak.

"If you will try and sleep, like a good girl, I will promise not to leave you again," he said at last. "Or are you in too much pain?"

"I will try, anyhow. It was all my own fault; I ought to have stayed here."

The night wore on, and at last a faint grey light announced the welcome approach of dawn. Major Monro leant over to look if Molly were sleeping, but met the glance of two bright wakeful eyes; her hair had escaped from her hood, and curled in rings about her forehead. He thought he had never seen a sweeter face. Would she think him too old, he wondered?

"Have you slept a little, you poor child?" he asked. "As soon as it is quite light we must leave this sacred edifice; it would never do to be seen here, and then we will make for Ben Aouda."

"Yes, I have slept, and my ankle is easier. I feel so dreadfully guilty, though, in being such a burden to you."

Major Monro felt a strong desire to kiss her, but immediately suppressed it, and remarked that he hoped he might never have a heavier one. He lifted her on her horse and they set out once more. By seven o'clock the sun was shining hotly, and this cheered them up. Presently they heard a shout from above; Mr. Colville and his party had halted for breakfast, and were signing for them to join them. When they heard what had befallen the two, Mr. Colville said that he had no doubt that his unfortunate men had been made away with in some way for the sake of their horses and arms; he felt very uneasy about his wife, who would, he feared, expect that something serious had happened, and the only thing to be done was to hurry back. When they reached home they learned that the soldiers had been set

upon by some marauders, one of their number had been murdered, but the other two had managed to escape.

"The tables are turned, Marjory," Mr. Colville remarked to his wife a fortnight after these occurrences, somewhat triumphantly. "It seems to me that Monro has discovered Molly's perfections, and the other two appear to be left out in the cold."

He was apparently right, for just at that moment the person mentioned was writing something on a leaf he had torn out of a note-book, and when he had finished he handed it to Molly, who was standing by, for perusal. Mr. Elton was there too, but not close to the others. It ran thus: "Come down into the garden for a minute. I want to ask you to be my wife."

Poor Molly blushed crimson, partly with indignation at being supposed capable of granting a request made in such terms. Major Monro did not find her once alone that day, and the next morning he took his host and hostess into his confidence; the latter, who highly approved, promised to manage it for him, and her husband remarked that he would take the other two men away that afternoon. An engagement with somebody was apparently inevitable, and they knew that General Nugent and Monro were friends. It was impossible for the ladies ever to leave the grounds except on horseback, as only women of the lower class walk, and Mrs. Colville took care that her young guest's horse should not be forthcoming; the rest was easy.

"Hold baby for me while I call Mahmoud, Molly," she said after lunch, quite casually. The girl imagined that all the men had gone out, and complied with her friend's request. Presently Mahmoud entered, black and shiny, and carried off his charge. He had no sooner done so than the person she least wished to see just then entered the room and walked straight up to her.

"Molly darling," he said, "is it all right?" But she could not answer, though she knew now there was no escape from this importunate person; eventually, however, he succeeded in getting her to look up at him for one brief moment, and then declared himself satisfied.

In thinking the matter over afterwards, Molly felt that she ought to have been displeased at so much being taken for granted, as she was not aware that she had ever done anything

to lead him to suppose, &c., &c., but when she mentioned her view of the matter to the person most concerned he assured her that she had, though she might not be aware of it, which so incensed her that a very pretty little quarrel nearly resulted from that rash remark, and for at least two hours that day she declined to speak to him. But he managed to make his peace, and now they are the happiest couple in the regiment.

SPAIN.

Into Temptation.

By A. PERRIN.

CHAPTER I.

MISS STOGDEN'S ANNOUNCEMENT.

"To mortal men great loads allotted be,
But of all packs, no pack like poverty."—*Herrick.*

I WAS neither dumb with grief, nor shaken with bitter tears, and yet I had just been told that my father and mother were both dead.

It looks very heartless written down in cold blood, but it was impossible to cry without any inclination to do so, and I sat and watched Miss Stogden's ready flow of sympathetic tears with a calmness that horrified the good old soul, who had watched over me ever since I was committed to her charge, a rebellious little mite of four years old.

Miss Stogden kept an establishment for Anglo-Indian girls on the outskirts of London, and I had been the youngest pupil she had ever received. But though she had seen me grow through my childhood from four years of age to nearly nineteen, and had conscientiously striven to win my heart and confidence, and make my life happy, she knew perfectly well she had never succeeded. Added to this, she could never bring herself to really like me, and this I had divined from the first, so that I met all her endeavours to make me look on her as a friend, and not as a schoolmistress, with a baffling wall of reserve and defiance.

I had been sent to her straight from India, under the charge of people who were paid to look after me, and from the day I sailed until the day I heard of my parents' deaths I had never even seen the faces of my father or mother.

I had one brother, Tom, nearly five years younger than myself, my recollections of whom were chiefly associated with the dirtiest pocket-handkerchiefs imaginable, a general odour of

boots, and an utter absence of anything approaching to manners. I had also a maiden aunt, a sister of my father's, who professed herself too much of an invalid to do more for me than come to see me whenever chance brought her to London, but who *had* once gone so far as to take Tom and myself to the sea-side for a week in the holidays, and as I fancy it would be difficult to say which of the three of us looked back with the most horror on the experiment, it was not repeated in any form.

Beyond these two, Tom and Aunt Addie, I now, so far as I knew, had no relations in the world. It had been arranged that this was to be my last term with Miss Stogden. I was already long past the age when most girls had left school and "come out," and at last, in reply to incessant entreaties on my part to my parents to be allowed to take my place in the world, the summons had come, and I was to have joined my people in three months. To go out to India had been the one event which I had longed for all my life with an intensity only known to myself, for I could but dimly remember any existence before I was put under Miss Stogden's charge, and the even monotony and dull routine of the long years had chafed and fretted me even more than I myself had realized at the time.

I saw other girls leave the gaunt dreary house joyous and triumphant, either taken away by newly-landed parents, or starting to join them out in India.

Even in the holidays nearly all of them had somewhere to go, while I remained behind waiting with restless longing for my day of deliverance.

And yet, when Miss Stogden told me, with many tears and caresses, that cholera had bereft me of both father and mother out in that far-off land, I made no sign of grief whatever.

"You see, Josephine," said Miss Stogden, fidgeting nervously with a letter she was holding in her thin bony hands, "your poor father was very well off while he was alive, yet apparently he lived up to his income, and his dying so suddenly leaves you and your brother practically destitute."

Then she took my hand sympathetically.

"I should not be bothering you with these details, my dear, while your trouble is so fresh, only that your aunt asked me in her letter to explain it all to you at once, as she did not feel

equal to writing to you as well as to me. Do you see, my child?"

"I see," I replied. "But what is to become of us?"

She handed me Aunt Addie's letter to read, in which, besides giving the information of my parents' deaths, she announced her intention of taking the burden of Tom and myself on her own shoulders.

"Since," as she somewhat ungraciously remarked, "there was no one else to do it."

Tom and I were not even entitled to any pensions, however small, as my father had been a barrister practising on his own account in India, so we had absolutely nothing of our own with which we might have helped to defray at least a part of the expenses she would have to incur on our account.

"What a Christian your dear aunt is!" sniffled Miss Stogden as I gave her back the letter.

I did not speak, but I sat, I must confess, simply burning with rage.

What had we ever done, Tom and I, that we should be left as a burden and expense upon anybody? Why had my father not taken such things as cholera into consideration when he made no provision for his children? And why should we have to subsist on charity merely because he could deny himself nothing while he was alive?

I could not trust myself to speak, so I allowed Miss Stogden to prose on without interruption.

"You see, dear, your aunt wishes you to leave me at the end of this term, which will be in a few days now, as the holidays are so near. She cannot afford to keep you on here, and, indeed, you are too old to stay at school any longer. No doubt you will be very useful to her at home. It is very hard that your brilliant life in India should be denied you; but, my dear, the hardest part of all is the loss of your mother! What is a young girl without her mother? A frail bark without a rudder!"

Miss Stogden completely broke down again.

"I've done very well without her up till now," I burst out fiercely, "and she seemed to manage quite as well without me. You know yourself she hardly ever wrote to me. Why did she leave me here all my life and never come home to see me? She might have had me out to her more than a year ago! But she

didn't *care*, she never *wanted* to see me, and if it had been *I* that had died she would have been even less sorry than I am about her!"

You would have thought by the expression of Miss Stogden's face that I had boxed her ears at the very least, and I began to feel almost remorseful for having so horrified the gentle old creature.

"Oh! my *dear* Josephine!" she exclaimed, too shocked even to cry. "I always felt this somehow; I always knew you were not quite like the other girls. Child, do not be so hard. Have you no love for any one in your poor little heart?"

I was sorry for Miss Stogden, she was in such genuine distress about me, but I answered boldly and told her the simple truth.

"There is no one in the world," I said, "whom I should be sorry to say good-bye to for ever, but I don't think that is much misfortune. I wanted to go into the world and *live*, you can't call this sort of existence living; but now I suppose I can never hope for that."

I spoke sullenly and recklessly. I did not care what I said, or what Miss Stogden thought of me. It was perfectly true that there was nobody in the world I cared two straws about, but the fact did not trouble me in the least.

I was not of an affectionate nature and had never tried to make myself popular with the other girls, nor agreeable to Miss Stogden.

I hardly knew anything of Aunt Addie and I was certainly not fond of her. Tom I had only seen a few times, and I had come to the conclusion that if all boys were like my only brother I never wished to meet another.

I saw that Miss Stogden was preparing for another long-winded expostulation on my heartlessness, so I hastily requested permission to retire to my room and think over my situation.

Being the oldest girl in the school I was allowed a room to myself, a luxury I had never really appreciated till that moment. I sat down on the edge of my bed with a feeling of leaden hopelessness at my heart. I certainly was shocked at the news I had just received, it was so sudden and unexpected, and I was undoubtedly sorry—but the sorrow was on my own account. I was bitterly disappointed. I had made up my mind that I was

to go to India; I had meant to live every moment of my life when I once began, and to enjoy myself thoroughly; and now all I had to look forward to was an existence of dull monotony as little varied as the flat uninteresting years I had dragged through at Miss Stogden's.

My parents had entered but little into my thoughts, and on the whole I could hardly be considered severely to blame on this point. They had evinced little or no interest in me, writing very seldom, and then short, common-place letters; delaying my coming out to them till they could ignore the fact of my being "grown up" no longer, and seeming, so far as I could judge, to be people who troubled very little about anything but themselves and their own amusements.

I knew enough of Aunt Addie to feel tolerably certain as to what existence would be like in her house. She lived in a villa at Bournemouth; she was fairly comfortably off, but her income died with her, and I knew that it would never occur to her to exert herself in any way on my account, so far as pleasure was concerned. In fact she would deem her duty by me more than well performed in giving me a roof over my head and sufficient food to eat.

After all, I considered, what else had I any right to expect?

I had never known anything different, and it was excessively good of her to undertake to maintain us at all.

I did my best to feel grateful, and wondered what would have happened supposing she had refused to have anything to do with us.

I next tried to imagine how Tom would behave under the circumstances. Probably boys of thirteen were affected by nothing but marbles, and rats, and string, but I certainly felt some misgivings as to how he and Aunt Addie would hit it off together, for there had been no love lost between them on the occasion of that memorable visit to the sea-side.

Tom was the one subject on which I heartily sympathized with Aunt Addie. He was a hopeless boy; he seemed to possess a diabolical faculty for divining one's weakest points and tenderest subjects, and he used this talent unsparingly.

Dignity or sarcasm had absolutely *no* effect on Tom; severity was futile, and if in despair you tried to make friends with him,

he regarded you with suspicion and requested to know what you wanted him to do for you.

Most of his holidays had been spent at the houses of various schoolfellows, and the fact of his ever having been invited twice to the same place remained an unaccountable mystery to me.

My meditations were cut short in their midst by the tea-bell, and I descended to the dining-room feeling somewhat important and rather enjoying the prospect of facing the other girls in my new *rôle* as an orphan, as I felt sure I should be treated with wondering respect and silent awe.

CHAPTER II.

AUNT ADDIE.

"But endless is the list of human ills,
And sighs might sooner fail than cause to sigh."—*Young.*

"SHUT the door, Josephine; the draught is something dreadful," whimpered Aunt Addie, drawing her shawl closer round her shoulders.

I shut the door reluctantly, for the heat of the room was already overpowering, and although a bright sun was shining outside and the weather was exceptionally warm, even for the end of July, yet all the windows were tightly closed, and pieces of felt nailed down the cracks to prevent the slightest breath of air finding its way into the stuffy unwholesome little drawing-room.

I had left Miss Stogden's careful, though worrying supervision for ever, and had been installed just two days with Aunt Addie in her Bournemouth villa.

I had a nice bedroom. Aunt Addie had supplied me with a new black dress and hat, accompanied by many complaints. I had as much food as I wanted, and was certainly warmer than I wished to be, so judging by many people's standards of happiness I had little to grumble about.

Ivy Villa was a red brick edifice of two storeys, with a neat gravel sweep up to the door, a square piece of lawn and some flowers in front of the drawing-room window, and a white entrance gate whereon was inscribed the name of the house.

I had already begun to wish myself anywhere but in my new

quarters, even if it were back at Miss Stogden's. There I *had* the excitement of girls going away, and fresh girls arriving, and the interest that the private affairs of each used to awake in my breast; but here, once I had studied the rooms, Aunt Addie and the two maid-servants, there was nothing to vary the long hot hours.

Aunt Addie rarely went out, and when she did it was generally in her bath chair round and round the grass plot, swathed in shawls and wraps, with a respirator over her mouth and her face tied up in a Shetland veil.

She was always irretrievably offended if any one even hinted that she was otherwise than at death's door. She was continually imagining that she had, or was on the point of having, some fresh disease, and considered herself a confirmed invalid.

She claimed this as a privilege she would share with nobody.

She was always prepared to administer medicine to any one to *prevent* their being ill, but, should some luckless person in her vicinity really get anything the matter with them, all they received were complaints of their selfishness in going to bed when they were not half as bad as she was, and peevish remarks as to the readiness *some* people evinced to give trouble.

On this particular day she declared her health was much worse than usual.

I was privately of opinion that Tom's momentarily expected arrival was principally what was the matter with her, and for once I could to a great extent enter into her feelings.

Rendered desperate by the heat of the room, I had opened the door when I thought she was asleep on her sofa, but had been caught in the very act, and peevishly told to shut it.

"Do you mind if I go out?" I asked, moving restlessly about the room.

"Good gracious! What *can* you want to go out for?" inquired Aunt Addie miserably. "The very idea makes me cold! And such an east wind as we've had all day. No, no, I can't have you going out and getting your feet wet. You would be laid up on my hands, which would make matters worse than they are at present."

It was useless to expostulate, so I sat looking out of the window, longing for a stroll in the soft afternoon air, until I saw the cab drive up which I knew contained Tom.

Here was a diversion certainly.

I was preparing to go and meet my brother, when a scream from Aunt Addie arrested my footsteps.

"You surely are not going to open the door!" she cried, sitting upright. "You thoughtless creature. The hall door will be open for at least five minutes and I should be chilled to the bone! Now you are *not* to let that boy in here till the cab has driven away."

I obeyed her and mounted guard over the drawing-room door, in case Tom should open it from the outside.

"Anybody at home?" he shouted presently, rattling the handle and kicking the lower panels.

"You can't come in till the cab has driven away," I answered through the keyhole, wondering what he must think of this strange welcome.

"It's gone. Let me in, you stupid."

"Shut the hall door, then," I replied. And this being done, Tom was allowed to enter. He was a fair-haired, freckled boy, rather small for his age, with a defiant, up-turned nose and twinkling grey eyes that saw everything they were not meant to see.

I believe he was considered clever, and he distinctly had a marvellous faculty for looking after himself, which was the only form of cleverness I could ever detect in his composition.

He sidled up to Aunt Addie, who languidly offered him her cheek to kiss, and while performing this ceremony he made a hideous grimace at me over her shoulder, of which, happily, she was unconscious.

Then he sat on the edge of a chair, swinging his feet backwards and forwards, and fiddled with the fringe round a small table-cover near him while he talked of his journey.

"Tom," I said at last, "I do wish you would keep still; you make me feel quite sick when you rock about like that."

I was really quite faint with the stuffiness of the atmosphere, and felt that the least thing would be enough to upset me.

"Well, mind you're sick your own side, then!" retorted Tom, grinning delightedly at his own wit, while Aunt Addie gazed at him in horror, too astonished and disgusted to speak.

Then tea was brought in before Tom had time to commit himself still further in words, but he made up for it in deeds by

finishing everything eatable on the tray, and almost emptying the sugar basin into his cup, after which he announced that he had not had enough to eat.

"Then go into the kitchen and be fed," said Aunt Addie, as if he were a wild animal. "Let him out, Josephine, and be sure you shut the door behind him."

Tom having been disposed of for the time being, I was meditating flight to cooler regions, namely, my own room, but this plan Aunt Addie frustrated.

"Where are you going *now?*" she inquired.

"I'm going upstairs."

"Oh! For goodness sake do try to stay in one place for at any rate half-an-hour. You have been in and out the whole day, and each time you let cold air into the room. Be content where you are. Get that book on the table and read to me."

I suppose my face must have expressed my feelings for I certainly made no remark, but Aunt Addie said:

"I should have thought you would have been only too glad to *be able* to do something for me considering the sacrifice I am making in having you here at all in my state of health. But no doubt you will be sorry when I'm gone, and then——"

"Where shall I begin?" I inquired, cutting short these lamentations and opening the book.

"At the beginning, of course," snapped Aunt Addie. And I commenced reading a treatise on consumption, which was dry and stupid, where it was not loathsome and nauseous, but which she enjoyed as much as if it had been the cleverest novel of the day.

I read on and on in a monotonous voice till Aunt Addie began to doze, and fearing I should wake her, and have to go on reading if I tried to leave the room, I laid aside the book and sat listening to the ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece, and staring into the glowing caverns of the huge fire.

I wondered how long my life would continue in this strain. Until Aunt Addie was "gone," to use her own expression, I supposed, and then in all probability I should have to earn my own living in any capacity that presented itself.

I felt that earning my own living at once would be preferable to the existence I saw stretched before me for an indefinite number of years. But then I was not clever enough to become a

governess, and certainly nobody who had spoken to me for half-an-hour would ever engage me as a companion. So apparently there was nothing for it but to make the best of matters as they stood, and look forward unflinchingly to a life of dreary dulness and unrelieved monotony.

The thought of marriage as a means of escape (even if there had been a chance of meeting any men except married clergymen or doctors at Aunt Addie's house) never entered my head. I had long ago come to the conclusion that I should never marry. I had made up my mind, according to my own ideas on the subject of beauty, that I was excessively ugly, and I entertained the mistaken notion, imparted to me by the few novels I had read, that ugly girls had little or no chance where matrimony was concerned.

The result of my cogitations was that I retired to bed that night with a heavy heart, bemoaning my misfortunes, instead of thanking Providence for having given me an aunt who was willing to provide for me at all.

CHAPTER III.

I MEET MY FATE.

"But now the hand of Fate is on the curtain,
And gives the scene to light."—*Dryden.*

THE next morning, as soon as I was dressed, Tom banged at my door, and requested me in a strident voice to go out with him.

So, knowing that Aunt Addie would not be ready for breakfast for at least two hours, if she came down at all, I put on my hat, and we strolled down the road in front of the house side by side.

"Beastly little hole," remarked Tom standing still and surveying the red brick villa with disgust.

I made no answer. I was wondering how many years I was going to live in it.

"You should see Barton's governor's place," went on Tom, Barton being an obliging schoolfellow who had formed a surprising attachment for my brother. "My golly! They've got *miles* of garden. And the stables alone are twice the size of that little box of a place."

"Why didn't you go and stay there again?" I inquired listlessly.

"Because Aunt Addie wrote and said I was to come here, so as thoroughly to understand my position, and that's just what I *don't* understand, so you can go ahead and tell me, Joe, for I can't see how the land lies at all."

"It's very easy," I said calmly. "Father and mother, as you know already, both died of cholera. And as they neither insured their lives nor saved any money, we're left entirely dependent on Aunt Addie."

Poor Tom's face was a study.

"Then I shall never go into the army now, or be like other fellows?" he asked in a small voice, swallowing hard and looking up at the sky.

"No," I said unsympathetically, "I don't suppose there is the faintest chance of your going into the army now. Probably Aunt Addie will try to get you into some office when you're old enough to leave school. But at any rate you may be thankful you're a boy and can go into the world and earn your own living. Look at *me;* I shall have to vegetate here for years, most likely, and then goodness only knows what will become of me."

I became engrossed in the contemplation of my own miseries.

"Well," said Tom presently, in a more cheerful voice, "you can tell Aunt Addie that I *do* understand my position, and that I'd rather finish the holidays at Barton's than stick on here."

Then he diverted his thoughts by kicking the same stone on in front of him for several hundred yards, rushing from one side of the road to the other, now into the ditch, and then into other people's gardens, and finally fell flat on his face covering himself from head to foot with dust and dirt.

Aunt Addie did appear to breakfast that morning for a wonder, and for a still greater wonder volunteered the information that she felt rather better than usual.

"The wind is not in the east to-day," she said, "and that always makes such a difference to me. I think I could manage to go out for a short time this afternoon, and perhaps a little walk would do you good, Josephine. Will you tell Mary to order my chair to be here at half past two?"

I wisely refrained from telling her that I had already been out, and seeing Tom opening his mouth to relate the circumstance, I managed to frown him into silence at the price of receiving two malicious kicks in the middle of my shin bone.

Punctually at two-thirty the bath chair was at the door. Mary was busily engaged in filling it with air-cushions, rugs and an enormous foot-muff. Finally Aunt Addie squeezed herself in with many complaints and groans, muffled up almost beyond recognition, and we started off, the chair-man with his back bent and his head well forward, as he dragged his burden, and I walking solemn and sedate by Aunt Addie's side.

"Have you got enough things on, Josephine?" she inquired in a muffled voice through her respirator.

"Oh! yes, loads," I said hurriedly, fearing she wished to envelope me in one of her spare wraps.

"I must get you a cardigan jacket," she went on, "to wear under your dress. One with a high neck and long sleeves like I always wear myself. In fact, I think you had better have mine and I will get myself a new one."

My heart sank within me.

"People are so careless about catching cold," continued Aunt Addie. "I am sure I should have been in my grave by now if I hadn't been so careful all my life. Now I wouldn't be out after five o'clock in the evening under *any* consideration."

"I suppose," I said, putting forth a feeler, "that you don't go into society at all, then?"

"Oh! dear, no," she replied in the tone of a martyr; "pleasure is not for *me*. I am far too delicate. Of course I know a few people in a way, but it is an understood thing that I never accept invitations anywhere. The only place I ever go to is the Vicarage of St. Simon's. Mr. Carey, the vicar, is a most charming man, and his wife often comes to inquire how I am. They keep their house very fairly free of draughts, so I go to see them sometimes, but I am too weak to pay other visits."

By this time we had got some distance from Ivy Villa, when suddenly a drop of rain fell on to Aunt Addie's glove. There was evidently going to be a shower.

"Oh! it's raining," she shrieked. "Put up the hood, William" (to the chair-man). "Quick! Quick! I shall catch my death of cold. And come inside the chair, you child; there's plenty of

room, and it's only a few yards to the Vicarage. Come, make haste ; make haste ! "

Half laughing and half angry, I was made to step into the chair, where Aunt Addie and I lay, one on the top of the other, smothered in rugs and flattened against the glass, which she insisted on having closed, like sardines in a box, until I honestly believed I should die of asphyxia.

Added to this the chair-man began to run, and we were shaken and jolted with such violence that I was surprised, when we came to a halt under the Vicarage porch, to find that I was still alive and unhurt. But we were not unpacked yet, and I lay helpless with my nose pressed against the glass, while William fumbled with the straps and buttons that kept it down.

Presently I saw a face peering into mine from the other side, with such curiosity and astonishment depicted on it, that I burst out laughing, and could not recover my gravity till after I had been let out and was once more standing safely on my feet.

A short, oldish-looking man was regarding me gravely through an eye-glass, while close beside him was a lady in a waterproof with a rosy cheery face, and her hat tilted so far forward that it almost rested on her nose.

" My *dear* Miss Cameron," she exclaimed, seeing Aunt Addie emerge from her shawls and wraps, " I had no idea it was you ! I declare I should never have believed two people *could* have got into one bath chair, much less out of it again, if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes ! Do come in till the shower is over."

" Thank you, dear Mrs. Carey," murmured Aunt Addie, allowing herself to be pulled out of the chair and helped into the house. " Such an unlucky thing my being caught in the rain ; the first time it has happened for years. Such a cold as I shall have in consequence, and my niece is sure to have taken a chill too, and then it will go through the house."

" Oh ! no, I hope not," said Mrs. Carey cheerfully, opening the door of a cosy little drawing-room. " Come in here and sit down. We will soon have a fire to warm you."

She deposited Aunt Addie in a large chair and then looked at me.

" So this is the niece you were expecting ? *I* have a new relation to show too. Andrew, let me introduce you to Miss Cameron. My cousin, Mr. Boscawen, from India."

The middle-aged man who had excited my mirth by peering at me through the glass of the bath chair came forward and gravely shook hands with Aunt Addie and myself.

He was rather short and stout, with sandy hair streaked with grey, an insignificant nose and a stubbly moustache.

His manner might have been called pompous, but I was greatly impressed with this air of dignity, and much interested in him on hearing that he came from India. Perhaps I could glean from him some idea as to what the life was like that had been denied to me for ever.

Mrs. Carey and Aunt Addie fell to discussing parlour-maids and their habits, *à propos* of the girl who had just been in to light the fire, so Mr. Boscawen and I were left to amuse each other.

He seemed very willing to talk to me, and we were soon deep in the subject of India, and to my great delight I discovered that some years ago he had met my parents.

"Yes, I met Mr. and Mrs. Cameron one year when I was at Allahabad, but I can scarcely say I knew them at all well," he said.

"You heard of their deaths?" I asked.

"Yes, yes," replied Mr. Boscawen hurriedly, looking as if he was afraid I might be going to cry; "dreadful, shocking, and a man who was fast coming to the front at the Indian bar."

"What was my mother like?" I inquired with curiosity.

"Exceedingly handsome. Very much admired wherever she went. You are extremely like her, if I may be allowed to say so."

This was delightful. I began to like Mr. Boscawen very much, and forthwith launched into a description of my bitter disappointment in not being able to go to India. I found Mr. Boscawen such an appreciative listener that by the time Aunt Addie rose to go, I had put him into possession of all the few facts of my uninteresting existence.

Our departure was anything but welcome to me. I had thoroughly enjoyed myself. Never before had I met with any one who seemed to consider my conversation worth listening to, and who did not treat me as a school-girl, or think about something else all the time I was talking.

I felt a different creature as I left the Vicarage, and certainly several inches taller. Aunt Addie was in a very bad temper all the way home, and snubbed me ruthlessly when I expressed my opinion as to the charms of Mr. Boscawen. She could not forgive herself for having been caught in the rain, and seemed to think the weather had played her a trick and must be secretly rejoicing at having outwitted her.

Tom was at home when we got back, and, not at all daunted by Aunt Addie's crossness, seemed more than usually inclined for conversation.

"I feel *so* bad," Aunt Addie complained, when she had been installed on her sofa and the room had been warmed up to baking point. "Mrs. Carey has been telling me about that Mrs. Pink who imagines she has got cancer. Such rubbish. The woman doesn't know what it is to be ill. She might talk, perhaps, if she had been through all *I* have."

"*I* know all about illnesses," said Tom with an air of great wisdom. "Barton's mater, you know, is very delicate, and nearly every time I go there she has something the matter with her."

He looked round as he said this as if the announcement redounded greatly to "Barton's mater's" credit.

"It's probably all fancy," said Aunt Addie snappily.

"*Indeed* it's not," shouted Tom with indignation.

Aunt Addie waved her hand feebly as if to dismiss the subject and sank back on her cushions with closed eyes.

"Barton's mater," began Tom again in a loud voice to attract Aunt Addie's attention, "has to stay in bed ever so much more than you do."

This revived her, and she opened her eyes quickly.

"I can't bear people who stay in bed for the express purpose of giving trouble," she retorted. "I myself always make a point of getting up even when I feel as if each step would be my last."

Tom was driven into a corner, but he could not allow this aspersion on "Barton's mater's" powers of endurance to go by unheeded, so he sat looking up at the ceiling and out of the window racking his brains for a suitable repartee. Presently his face brightened.

"The last time I was at Barton's," he said slowly, fixing his

twinkling grey eyes on Aunt Addie's face, "his mater had one thing which *you've* never had."

"Well, and what was that?" asked Aunt Addie with much irritation, though unable to resist the inquiry.

"A baby!" replied Tom.

Poor Aunt Addie collapsed entirely vanquished, while Tom fled into the garden and cut triumphal capers in front of the window, which was luckily behind the head of the sofa and therefore out of her sight.

(*To be continued.*)

"The Mystery of Castle Crome."

I CANNOT attempt to explain the incident in this story. I will only relate it just as it occurred.

* * * * *

I shall never forget the winter of 1880.

In that year my sister Grace and I were invited to spend Christmas and New Year with some friends who had recently bought a fine old place in Devonshire.

We were wild with delight at the thought of at last being able to see a little of the world.

My father was a country rector, with a large family of children, so, what with his ever decreasing tithes, and ever increasing family, he had rather a hard time of it.

The great puzzle with us all just then, was how to replenish our wardrobes for this wonderful visit.

Oh, the contrivance and self-denial, and patience that our dear mother and eldest sister displayed in getting us ready!

A vision comes before me now, as I write, of our long, low school-room, a bright fire burning in the grate, and the cold December sunshine shining on our heap of finery on the table, and brightening the fair sweetness of my mother and Maud's face. So alike they were!

Grace and I were helping also, but not in the deft, clever way the others manifested.

"We must be quick," said my mother. "The dinner bell will soon ring and father must not see us untidy, nor unpunctual, because of your little dissipation," and she looked fondly at us.

Just then one of the boys came sauntering in from the Grammar School near by.

"What do you call this thing?" said Jack, picking up a piece of tulle from the table; and then, throwing it over his curly head, he marched round the room, shouting, "This is how Grace means to wear it; only hold your noddle straight, miss, or it is safe to come off."

Up jumped Grace and flew after him, and in the midst of the confusion that ensued, mother was called away; and Hal came briskly in.

"What's in the wind now?" he asked. "Jack into mischief, as usual," and picking him up by the scruff of the neck as if he had been a puppy, he ignominiously expelled him from the room.

Then setting his back against the door, our tall, strong brother, shaking his head very solemnly at us, thus proceeded:

"I have a duty to perform which grieves me, but you know I never shrink from duties. *Girls*, this Castle Crome visit will turn out badly; you had better give it up. I have been looking over some old records and I find the blessed old place is haunted."

"Haunted!" we screamed in one breath, and Grace looked scared.

"Yes, *haunted*, and in a peculiarly horrible manner. Some hundreds of years ago, in one of the wings of the old castle, two lovely sisters were murdered in the night, and when their room was entered in the morning they were found lying side by side, stiff and straight for burial, with no mark to tell of the foul deed, save a dark bruise on one fair girl's forehead. I am giving it to you chapter and verse."

"Hal," said Maud, gravely, "how can you? It is going too far—it is quite wicked. Suppose either of the little ones had been here?"

"Well, suppose they had? Then I should have shut up," said Hal, quite crossly for him. "All I have been saying is true and you can read it for yourselves."

At that minute the first dinner bell rang, and we all scuttled away to get tidy ourselves and help the little ones, but, through and above all the happy buzz of our pleasant home life, I felt the chill of Hal's words.

We had never been allowed to hear any ghost stories, and this weird tale of Hal's fastened itself on my memory.

About a week after this, in a wild and stormy evening, the driving mist shutting out the glorious Devonshire scenery, our train steamed into Castle Crome station.

We stepped out of the carriage, cramped and tired with our long journey, and with no one to meet us.

With some heart-sinking we collected our luggage, and went into the station, there to wait for what might betide.

In the waiting room was the dearest and rosiest of old ladies. Her sweet blue eyes clouded over with real sympathy when she heard of our plight.

"Castle Crome! dear me! that is some distance from here—a fine old place on the sea shore; I know it well."

"Do you, indeed? Is it then haunted?" I asked, something seeming to impel me to speak.

"Yes," she answered, nodding her head wisely. "It is said to be, and none of the village folk will go there after dark."

"What are they supposed to see?" I asked in a low tone.

"Only the old Squire Crome—the late squire—riding slowly round the carriage drive on his old grey cob."

"What rubbish!" I exclaimed. "Is there not a story about two girls having been murdered there years ago?"

"Not that I ever heard of," she said, looking puzzled.

At that instant there came a sound of prancing steeds, and a carriage and pair came into view, dashing up to the station in fine style.

Out of it sprang, all in the drizzling rain, a fair-haired, bright-faced girl whom we well knew, our own especial friend, Dolly Portal.

"Oh, you poor darlings!" she exclaimed, flying into the station with outstretched hands. "Cold and tired and hungry, that's what you are—and no one to meet you! I made a mistake in the time; please forgive me."

"Come along," she went on, scarcely waiting for us to take a cordial leave of the old lady. "Come along. I have a basket of good things in the carriage, as we don't dine till late; and as we go along I will tell you all the fun. We have a houseful of visitors, and are to have a dance early in the New Year."

All our shyness and fatigue melted away at sight of our friend, and on hearing her gay prattle, and we were all chatting merrily together when—after rather a long drive—we drew up at the great entrance of the castle.

It was indeed a grand pile of buildings, flanked by two massive wings. I could not help wondering what the dead and gone Cromes would have thought, could they ever have guessed that their fine old castle would, one day, pass into a *wine merchant's* hands. However, "such is life."

There was a circular sweep in front of the hall door, which

opened out into a drive at the side, leading through a small park. The other side of the castle looked straight out over the sea, and we could hear the hoarse music of the waves as they dashed against the cliffs, or swished into the caves close by.

"This is a glorious old place," said Grace, springing lightly out of the carriage; "how we shall enjoy ourselves, Nancy," and, without waiting for an answer, she sped lightly up the steps by the side of Dolly, while I followed more slowly.

In the moment that we were waiting for the great door to unclose, the watery moon came out from a great bank of clouds, and I glanced curiously at the circular drive.

Certainly, there was no sign to-night of old Squire Crome and his old grey cob; and at that minute the door unclosed, and such a burst of glad welcome met us, that effectually drove all thought of ghost and goblin out of my head.

Indeed, as the days passed on, the atmosphere of the house was so full of light-hearted, innocent gaiety, that there was no time for a single gloomy thought.

The old place was exquisitely and brightly furnished, and decorated—in an old style indeed—to be in harmony with the building, but every object around was so beautiful, that the eye was unconsciously soothed and rested.

Our bedroom was particularly charming, with a small dressing-room adjoining, and I must confess that each night when I retired to rest, I was too happily tired, and my head too full of delightful plans for the morrow, to have a single thought to spare for Hal's ghost story.

There was a certain Dr. Anderson amongst the company—a rich man, and very high in his profession, who seemed—yes, I do think he was really taken with our bonny Grace—and I noticed day by day how her sweet shy eyes grew brighter, and the rose tint on her cheek deepened, as he showed ever-increasing interest in her, and she unfolded silently to his influence like some sweet perfumed flower.

* * * * *

The night of the dance at length arrived, and the house was crammed with guests.

Mrs. Portal asked us if we would mind giving up our bedroom

to Colonel and Mrs. Saxby, and take one in another wing, equally pretty, but without a dressing-room.

Of course we gladly complied, and indeed the new chamber was even prettier than the last, only it was a panelled room, and in what was called the turret wing.

This building, we afterwards found, was the only part of the very old castle remaining, and had no connection with the two front wings.

I shall never forget how carefully we dressed for that dance, decking our plain white dresses with real flowers and ivy; and certainly in Grace the effect was charming.

What a delightful evening it was! Plenty of partners, and everybody kind and good-natured.

I was so taken up sometimes in watching Dr. Anderson and Grace, that I was almost in danger of forgetting my share in the evening's festivities.

As I was standing for a minute alone, by a gigantic palm, and with a swelling heart, listening to the murmur of admiration that Grace's exceeding loveliness called forth, I was almost startled by a little tap on my arm, and looking round encountered the amused eyes of a tall, dark stranger.

"Day dreams in a ball-room!" he said in quick, decisive tones. "I am sorry to disperse them, but I *must* dance, and I should like to dance with you. Not engaged? Ah! that is well. You are Anne Stratten," he went on, "and I am Jack Portal, bronzed and changed no doubt by long travels, but still the same Jack as of old. And little Anne, I should have known you anywhere. Do you remember I used to call you Nancy, and, I am sorry to say, sometimes *Nan?*"

"Yes, indeed," I said, "and how cross I used to be; but I am very glad you are come back."

"That is just what I wanted to know," he said quietly. "Now we will dance."

I felt it only wanted Jack Portal's arrival to make this evening the most perfect of my life.

A little before supper, Captain Cameron, with whom I had been dancing, accidentally trod upon my dress and tore it, at least a yard. What would Maud say? This famous dress to be spoiled in one night's wear!

Then a happy thought struck me. I would slip out, fly up-

stairs, mend it, and be back again before the supper dance, for was I not to dance that with Jack? Seizing my opportunity, I flew out into the brilliantly-lighted hall, and up the grand staircase. It rises before me now as I write—the splendidly carved staircase, the statues holding soft bright lights, the flowers, and palms and ferns—I see it all, and feel the perfumed air.

I sped gaily along the grand corridor, and then turned into one narrower, in order to reach the lofty arch draped with scarlet that led into the turret wing.

Soon after I had turned into the second corridor, I thought I heard footsteps following me. Was it Grace, or some servant? I turned carelessly round, and saw standing a few paces from me a dark, evil-faced woman, dressed in the strangest costume. The light shone full upon her face, and brought out every line and expression. She was looking fixedly at me in a very strange manner. My heart beat very fast, but steadying myself I said in a husky voice:

"What do you want?"

No answer. Only the dreadful gaze from those fierce eyes. I felt thoroughly frightened then, and like a very child, throwing my torn skirt over my arm, I rushed along the corridor with a speed that I knew a heavy woman like that could never compass.

But for all that, she was close behind me, and the instant I turned under the archway into the turret wing, she was close beside me, and in another minute we were standing looking into each other's faces. By no wish of mine, you may be very sure; but I seemed under a spell, and not able to move.

Her black eyes, fastened on my face, seemed gradually curdling my blood and turning me to stone. I could neither move nor speak. She was holding me as truly as by heavy cords, but they were *invisible* cords, I felt no bodily touch nor coercion. It was a wicked *spiritual* influence.

I felt too despairing even to hope for rescue; it seemed as if this would go on eternally, and that I was bound to her for ever and for ever.

Then all at once, above the hopeless anguish of my mind, a blessed name was borne in upon my thoughts. The very idea seemed to give me power to open my lips, and in a voice not like my own, I said:

"In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, release me."

That very instant, as surely as I write, the invisible bonds snapped asunder, I was free as air, and the woman had disappeared.

When I came to myself, some time after, I was lying on a sofa in the housekeeper's sitting-room, and she was pouring some cordial down my throat.

"One of the maids found you fainting in the corridor, miss, and brought you here. You are over-tired no doubt."

Then I sat up and remembered all, and a violent fit of shuddering came over me.

"I will ask Dr. Anderson to look at you," said Mrs. Parker with much concern.

"No, no," I said. "Only let my sister and Mrs. Portal know that I am all right, only tired, and I will wait here for Grace."

"Will you go to your own room?" said kind Mrs. Parker. "There is sure to be a nice fire, and I will send you some refreshments."

Pass through that dreadful corridor and under that archway without Grace! No, never!

I looked round the bright little room.

"Oh! let me stay if I am not in your way," I said, and so it was settled.

I had many visitors, as I feared.

Dr. Anderson lightly felt my pulse and with a curious glance said:

"Quiet is all she needs. Come along, we must clear the room."

He was obeyed, Grace and Dolly only stopping behind a moment, to kiss and fondle me, and express their sympathy.

Jack Portal once put his head in at the door and said:

"Come, come, this will never do, Miss Nancy. You promised me the supper dance, and you know you dance like a fairy."

I made him some laughing reply, and as the door closed Mrs. Parker said:

"He always did set such a store by you, Miss Anne; isn't it a blessing he has come home safe from foreign parts?"

Mrs. Parker was quite an old friend. She had been a kind of

upper nurse at the Portals' when we were all children. She loved all the Portals, but she adored Jack.

* * * * *

About two hours later, Grace and I were seated before a glowing fire in our bedroom, in dressing gown and slippers, with our hair floating around us.

The bedroom was—as I have before said—a panelled room, and whatever was the prevailing tone in olden times, it was now a pale blue. It was a very pretty room indeed, and especially cheerful, and seemed such a happy refuge after my fright.

I breathed freely now the door was safely locked, the fire was burning brightly, and I had my Gracie.

She was full of gay chatter, and Dr. Anderson's name was often mentioned.

I glanced round the room again while she was talking, and noticed for the first time how exquisitely the bedstead was carved and that it was not modern. But the silken coverlet, the lace trimmed pillows, and our pretty bright sachets lying ready for us on either side of the bed, looked cosy and modern enough, and all my ghostly fears fled.

I drew my chair closer to the fire and put my feet upon the fender. So did Grace, and in this manner we were both sitting with our back to the bed.

"I will tell you all now, Gracie," I said, and then I told her all about my terrible fright in the corridor.

Grace grew pale as I concluded, but she rested her cheek caressingly on my shoulder and said:

"All imagination, Nannie; you were over-excited and tired."

"You are welcome to think so," I said, "and we won't discuss the subject; but to me it seems to bring honour to 'the name that is above every name.'"

"Yes," she softly said, and then we remained a long time silent, her head resting on my shoulder and her long golden hair falling like a shower over my dressing gown. The brush had fallen from her hand, and I noticed the curious effect in the firelight of the mingling of my dark hair with her bright tresses.

No sound broke the happy stillness of the room, except the

low sighing of the flames, and outside the dashing of the waves against the cliffs and the tapping of ivy leaves against the window panes.

Presently, with a happy sigh, Grace sat up, such a light in her eye, and rose tint on her cheek.

"Nancy, we must go to bed," she said. "Dr. Anderson is going to teach me a new figure on the ice to-morrow, and I do *love* skating," and she turned, as if towards the bed.

"*This* morning you mean, darling," I said, slowly rising to follow her.

I heard then an inarticulate sound from Grace, and turning sharply towards her, I saw a sight which froze my blood.

Grace stood quite upright and rigid, every trace of colour had fled, and her long bright hair fell over her blue dressing-gown like a glory.

Her face looked to me just like the face of a statue, except that her lips were parted, her hands extended, and her eyes dilated with an unspeakable horror. I followed the direction of this horrified gaze and *saw*—— But how can I describe it? Gone from the bed were the silken coverlets, the lace, the fripperies! Gone were our bright new sachets, all gone!

Instead, the bed was heavily draped with dark green velvet and antique fringe, and lying side by side in *our bed*, stiff, straight and dead, were two lovely young girls, pure-looking and placid, only there was an ugly blue mark on the temple of one.

I do think the shock of this sight would have *killed* me only there was Grace to be thought of. I flew to her; I could not speak, my mouth was parched and dry, but I tried to drag her to the door, she *ever* resisting, though faintly, and *ever* keeping her awful gaze fixed upon the bed.

How I unlocked the door and got her into Dolly's room I could never after tell, but we did get there at last, and Dolly, sitting up shivering in bed, saw, by her dying firelight, a sight she could never after forget.

Grace, standing upright and rigid in the middle of the room, her affrighted eyes wildly dilated and uttering a succession of the most fearful shrieks that could ever have fallen from human lips.

Soon the room was in a hubbub. The only distinct sound I heard after was Dr. Anderson saying in a deeply moved voice:

"She must have had some frightful shock; leave her to me and Mrs. Portal."

I remember nothing more, and it was some days before I recovered full consciousness.

When I did, my mother was bending over me, and that was consolation indeed.

After that, she never left Grace night nor day.

It was a weary, anxious time that followed.

A great doctor came down from London in consultation with Dr. Anderson and they both thought Grace would die. Even if her life were spared, they agreed she would lose her senses.

Imagine therefore my thankfulness when, one evening as I was sitting in a low chair by the side of her bed, looking—oh, so anxiously at her dear wan face, she suddenly unclosed her eyes, and looking at me quite sensibly, said, in the faintest of faint tones:

"I remember it all. Nan, did you see them? Ah, I see you did. Poor girls! They could not harm us!"

"No indeed, darling," I answered soothingly, and giving her some beef tea, told her to go to sleep, which she did, and from that time recovered rapidly.

The full particulars of that night were told to very few people, and *they* seemed a little sceptical about the "appearances."

"At any rate," said kind, motherly Mrs. Portal, "there shall be no shadow on the brightness of this dear old place Father wants a fresh gallery for his new pictures, so we will have a heavy oaken door where the archway now is, and shut off the whole of the turret wing. Father can have that for his pictures."

This was done, and many times in after years I have wandered by daylight, quite alone, all over the turret wing looking at the pictures.

The buying of pictures was Mr. Portal's great hobby, and a very expensive one he found it. However, he was immensely rich, and no doubt got taken in over and over again.

* * * * *

Many years have passed away.

My sister Grace has long since married Dr. Anderson, and a very happy match it has proved.

I am engaged to Jack Portal, and Jack sometimes asks me what I think the pictures see at midnight, in the turret wing.

This I know of a surety, if I were to go there at midnight, footsteps would follow me, a dark, evil-faced woman would try to enthral me, and in the blackest of black nights an unearthly light would ever show up the two murdered girls in their antique bed under the heavy canopy.

The portraits stare stonily night after night on strange scenes in the turret wing, but—like the dead—they tell no tales.

SARAH CATHERINE BUDD.

Tennyson.

THE last great English poet of our time has passed from our midst. In his death he has been very blessed. Like another sweet singer, the royal Psalmist of Israel, it was given to Alfred Tennyson to live a long and splendid life, and to die in his own land, "full of days, riches and honour."

What the sentiment of England is with regard to Tennyson, cannot be more fitly expressed than in the words of a letter, three years old, a birthday greeting, sent by a brother poet on August 5, 1889. Here is what Robert Browning said to Tennyson in that greeting:

"MY DEAR TENNYSON,

"To-morrow is your birthday—indeed a memorable one. Let me associate myself with the universal pride of our country in your glory, and in its hope that for many and many a year, we may have your very self among us—secure that your poetry will be a wonder and delight to all those appointed to come after; and for my own part let me further say, I have loved you dearly. May God bless you and yours.

"At no moment from first to last of my acquaintance with your works, or friendship with yourself, have I had any other feeling expressed, or kept silent than this—that I am and ever shall be, my dear Tennyson, admiringly and affectionately yours,

"ROBERT BROWNING."

This letter from the one great poet to the other—those two who have stood side by side in the English literature of the Victorian era, who rest side by side under the grey shadow of the Abbey walls—this letter is now historic; and in its utterance, we may again say, that there is to be found the expression and embodiment of the sentiment of England to-day. The affection and admiration of the British people are without doubt the possession of Alfred Tennyson. More, they have been his for many a year. The Laureate was distinctively the poet of the English nation,

the poet of English thought, and feeling, and belief. He came into our age, the exponent of its especial aspects and problems of thought and creed, and it may be truly admitted that the passing of Tennyson marks the close of an epoch in modern literature.

We will glance back for a moment over that long and honourable career, the dawn of whose first splendour was almost co-terminous with the commencement of the Victorian era, and which, in the results of its working, has expressed perhaps more completely than any other, the various moral, social and historical incidents and movements bound up with that period.

Alfred Tennyson was born on the 6th of August, 1809. He was the third of seven brothers. His father was the Rev. George Clayton Tennyson, rector of Somerby, in Lincolnshire, where the poet was born. His mother was Elizabeth, daughter of the Rev. Stephen Fytche, vicar of Louth, in the same county. The mothers of great men have, we know, not seldom been themselves distinguished for no small share of mental gifts; of Afred Tennyson's mother we are told, that "She was a sweet and gentle and most imaginative woman;" and that it was under her tender sway his early education was conducted. If we mistake not, it is Mr. Gladstone who has spoken of Tennyson as above all poets, the "poet of woman," who has declared that no poet has ever displayed a more profound knowledge of women and womanhood, ever probed deeper down into the hidden heart of that sex which is admittedly a difficult problem to the majority of men. Perhaps it was in the loving companionship of that sweet and tender and most imaginative mother, that the poet learned the delicate and sympathetic respect for all women, as such, which was in the years to come to find expression in some of the most beautiful utterances ever given in song, to woman.

So early as his childhood, the first signs of poetic tendency showed themselves. Quite in his childish days he wrote, at his grandfather's request, an elegy on the death of his grandmother. Strange foreshadowing of the future! That he who in after years was to give his country a most sublime memorial to a lost friend; that he who should live to write "In Memoriam," should have penned in his first childish verse, a sad farewell to one dear and dead.

In the very early poems of Tennyson, however, there can be found no indications of that nascent genius which the years were

to bring to a perfect fruition. Not even in that first volume of poems, the joint work of Alfred Tennyson and his brother Charles, published when the lads were together pupils at the Grammar School of Louth, and issued under the title of "Poems of Two Brothers," are there any hints of marked genius. Interesting, in the light of his subsequent fame, as these early verses of the Laureate's work would undoubtedly be, the wisdom of withdrawing them from public perusal cannot be questioned. They were written when Tennyson was something under eighteen years old, and the volume in which they appeared side by side with those of his brother, had not even a *succès d'estime.* Not long after this the two brothers went up to Cambridge, where their eldest brother Frederick was already an undergraduate, and in the year following his entrance at the University, Alfred Tennyson won the Chancellor's medal from his friend Arthur Hallam (who, with Richard Monckton Milnes, was also a competitor) for a poem entitled "Timbuctoo." This, which was written in blank verse attracted some favourable notice in the press, and appeared among the contents of *Prolusiones Academenicæ.* A year later still, the young poet took the initiative step in what was now evidently destined to be his career. In this year, 1830, he published a volume of verse, which he sent forth under the title of "Poems, chiefly Lyrical." Of these, the real first-fruits of his genius, it may be seen that they attracted both admiration and ridicule.

At this early period, Tennyson's work fell under the ban of the old Lake School, and the disciples of the latter, led by "Christopher North," pronounced upon the new aspirant for fame, a criticism and condemnation as ill-judged as it was premature. Popular tradition has it that Keats died of an adverse criticism. The strength of Alfred Tennyson did better—it lived to confute his detractors. Yet, in justice to "Christopher North" and the Lake School, let it be said that in Tennyson's earlier poetry there is much that is unworthy of his maturer powers. During the long years which intervened between the death of his beloved friend, Arthur Hallam, and the publication of the poem which first established his claim to rank as a star of the first magnitude in the poetic firmament, it is evident that the poetic quality in Tennyson was gathering to itself ever-deepening power; laying up for itself fresh stores of knowledge; working out strenuously deeper

problems, until all these, fused in the fire of imaginative genius, gave, first, that great British elegy, "richest oblation," as Mr. Gladstone styles it, "ever offered at the tomb of departed friendship," and later, the epic which stands above and beyond all its author's other works, the epic which is one of the noblest ornaments of modern English literature, than which, had Tennyson never written a line but it, would have placed him once and for ever among the Immortals. "The Idylls of the King" are the consummation, the completion, the ripest richness of the poetic genius of Alfred Tennyson.

Without, in these narrow limits, attempting anything like an exhaustively critical examination of his poems as they stand in chronological order, it is possible to indicate slightly and briefly some outlines of the course which the poet's genius pursued.

Now it will be no presumptuous disparagement to say here that the course of Tennyson's genius was not one unchecked march of triumphal progress. His imagination was fitful. At times his muse touched the heights, at times it faltered upon the wing. For example, in 1847 "The Princess" appeared. It is fair to say that it was not until the appearance of the five songs, incorporated in the poem in the second edition, that the poem itself made any way in general appreciation. The fact is, that in this poem (which its author sub-styled a medley, for some reason not clearly apparent), Tennyson's peculiar method puzzled and confounded ordinary readers. The five songs, on the other hand —exquisite melodies in verse, as they are—came home at once to human hearts. They form, in truth, a group of lyrics as noble as anything in the language. It is safe to say that "As through the Land," "Sweet and Low," "The Splendour falls on Castle Walls," "Ask me no more," and "Home they brought her Warrior, dead," will be dear to the English people as long as English songs endure. Nevertheless, the internal evidences of curiously mingled strength and weakness are in "The Princess" even more marked than in "Maud," admittedly the poet's least attractive effort of writing. Opinion as to "Maud" is widely diversified. It has been condemned as showing undue sympathy with perfectly hysterical passion. But it has also, perhaps, been more justly said, that here the Laureate was not dealing with a theme congenial to his best powers; that the excess of sentimental sorrow, overweighted romance, of unbalanced passion which runs through

every line, is not in sympathy with the distinct bias of Tennyson's mind.

Professor Dowden and other critics have shown how strong a feeling for the dignity and righteousness of law is interwoven with all Tennyson's deepest feelings. Therefore it has been put forward, that the frantic sentimentalism of "Maud," and some portions of "Locksley Hall" are intended as a species of satire on the extravagances which they contain. If this be so, then it can only be said that Tennyson is not happy in such satire. Indeed, a more philosophic aspect is clearly his delight. Passion there is with Tennyson, but not the passion which overleaps the sober bounds of certain laws involving the true dignity of the race. And in this we see traces of that intense insularity of feeling and intellect which has gone far to make Tennyson above and beyond all modern poets, the chosen poet of the English nation. Perhaps there is no English poet of any time, except, of course, Shakespeare, who has more closely reached hold of the heart of the nation, than Tennyson; no poet whose fine utterances are household words on the lips of his fellow countrymen and women.

If the limitation of his genius, contained in this insularity of ideas, now and then draws him back from the highest height, it has, at the same time, endeared him beyond common affection to his own nation. His own intense affection for England and everything English lies on the surface of his verse. As Mr. Stedman says of him in the "Victorian Poets:" "In his verse he is as truly the 'glass of fashion and the mould of form' as Spenser was of the Elizabethan Court, Milton of the Protectorate, Pope of the reign of Queen Anne. His poetry has gathered all the elements which find vital expression in the complex modern art." Perhaps in the entire range of his poetry there is no achievement of Tennyson's which exemplifies this view of Mr. Stedman's better than "In Memoriam."

It may be said of this last, that it stands alone in the estimation of the English-speaking race. It is full of more notable sayings than, not excepting the Idylls, any other poem of Tennyson's. If the "Idylls of the King" be Tennyson's greatest work, "In Memoriam" is his most characteristic and deeply significant one. It has ingathered the fullest maturity of intellect, the rarest deeps of emotion, the most piercing cry of bereavement. Above all, it

stands vividly in peculiar relation to the needs, and wants, the hopes, and certainly the fears, of the age which saw its production. It has been well written, that "it was by no means accidental that from its first appearance the poem found recognition, as fully at one with advancing ideas, and that it gave them an articulation and expression vainly sought before. The cause may be understood when we trace that long period of seventeen years from Arthur Hallam's death in 1833 to the publication of 'In Memoriam,' in 1850, during which, while the age was becoming aware of its deepest spiritual problems, the poem was also progressing point by point towards completion. In those years Tennyson was living through in person what was afterwards to be reproduced in the spirit of the time. Nor was the age far behind him. Even as he wrought, he was surrounded by the grey of a new morning; to him it was merely given to catch from the heights of poetic vision the first gleams of the dawn. True as it is in a sense, therefore, that Tennyson led his age, it is yet truer to say he found his age,—gave quickening and impulse to what already existed in many minds, germinating deeply and waiting for expression. It is for this reason that when the poem emerged from its long period of secret growth, it became at once the mould which, beyond any other single work of literature, has till this day given shape to the religious thought of the time."

To this, it may be added that "In Memoriam" is beyond question a British Elegy, and that as such there is none which can fitly compare with it. The mind that conceived it had in truth vitally united itself with the deepest thought of the age; yet at the risk of seeming contradiction it must be admitted that as the poet of our modern days, Tennyson is not altogether in sympathy with the most modern spirit of thought. His eclectism may indeed be taken as forming a link between the old and the new schools. Perhaps the best illustration of this is to be found in the fact, that the distance which lay between Tennyson and the old Lake School, may be said to be commensurate with that which lies between his philosophy and the more advanced portion of the Modern School at the present day.

The year 1850 was the commencement in every sense of a fresh epoch in the poet's career.

After leaving Cambridge, which he did without proceeding to a degree, Tennyson seems to have led a somewhat wandering

existence. London, of course, found him very often. There he associated with Carlyle, Thackeray, John Stuart Mill, John Sterling, W. E. Gladstone, Walter Savage Landor, Henry Lushington, Richard Monckton Milnes, Leigh Hunt and Macready the actor. To the Carlyles, Tennyson appears to have been pre-eminently attractive. Here is how Carlyle writes of him at this time to Emerson:—

"Alfred is one of the British and foreign figures, who are, and remain beautiful to me—a living human soul, to whom your own soul can say, Brother!—one of the finest-looking men in the world. A great shock of rough dusty-dark hair, bright laughing hazel eyes; massive aquiline face, most massive yet most delicate; of sallow brown complexion, almost Indian-looking; clothes, cynically loose, free and easy; smokes infinite tobacco. His voice is musically metallic—fit for loud laughter and piercing wail, and all that may lie between; speech and speculation, free and plenteous. I do not meet in these late decades such company over a pipe."

To this may be added Mrs. Carlyle's quota:—

"He is a very handsome man, and a noble-hearted one, with something of the gipsy in his appearance, which for me is perfectly charming."

Nevertheless, even in his early manhood, the love of company was not in Tennyson. He did not display at any time the genial sociability and power of attracting society to him, that distinguished his compeer, Robert Browning. He had a half contemptuous but very real horror, as Charles Knight records, of *digito monstrari*. After his marriage with Miss Emily Sellwood, a niece of the great Arctic explorer, Sir John Franklin, which took place in 1850, he withdrew more and more into retirement. The somewhat sensitive inability to appreciate the charms of general society grew very much upon him. Nor would it appear that he attracted around him in his very happy home, that ring of personal friends which men of his order delight to have about them. There was indeed about Tennyson a certain chill reserve. It would almost seem as though the capacity for close friendship, which his nature contained, had gathered itself up and concentrated its entire force upon that friend of his youth, so early lost, so deeply mourned; as if he had, indeed, but little friendship left for other men. There has been about Alfred Tennyson, in his life, as in

his death, a certain Rembrantesque dignity and reserve—a certain subduing of lighter colouring, of lighter aspects of life.

The year which had seen his marriage and the publication of "In Memoriam," also saw him chosen to succeed Wordsworth as Poet Laureate. Five years previously Wordsworth had written of him: "He is decidedly the first of our living poets, and I hope will live to give the world better things." The appointment met with the approval of the whole nation. Yet the finest of the Laureate's works was still to come, and when it did come in its completed form, the great creative period of Tennyson's life may be said to have ended. That is, the creative period of the poet, his dramatic works belonging to his later years. In the "Idylls of the King," Tennyson used English blank verse, and used it, perhaps, in an absolute perfection. It was, as it has been well said, the "mighty line" of Marlowe in a softer and sweeter strain. There has been more than one attempt made to detract from the power of this great Christian epic, but to deny the greatness of this poem would be to deny the greatness of the poet itself, for in it the whole mind and art of Tennyson have been concentrated. It is true that he is not a world poet. It is true that those very characteristics which make him essentially an English poet tend to obscure from his sight the larger world which lies outside his own people and his own land. His heroes and his heroines are all characteristically English; his pictures are set in an English landscape, always without variation. But who has touched these English men and women with a greater grace? Who has spread forth the fair English landscape before our eyes with more consummate colouring? None, unless we go back to Shakespeare. Tennyson's pictures surpass Wordsworth's because there is in them all the note of an unwearied sympathy with the "human heart that beats," even if that human heart be always of necessity an English heart. He had his limitations, but within them there are few that overshadow him. The nation will find it hard to listen to a singer whose voice shall equal in fascination the voice of this great singer of sweet songs. It will be well for any nation and for England to have a singer who shall sing for them, as he always sang, of all those things that are true, and lovely and of good report; who will speak to tell his countrymen of the "white flower of a blameless life;" who can point to the Golden Age of

which all poets chant, as that which will be achieved by the patient working out of true progression; who can say for it:

"Patience! There is a hand that guides."

Better, one who can live in his own life, the high morality which he sings of in his verse. It is well for a nation to have had this strong Soul—this soul who went to its voyage into the Infinite with only the calm request, most earnestly offered, most touchingly granted:

"Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar
When I put out to sea.

But such a tide as, moving, seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell
When I embark;

For though from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar."

ELLA MACMAHON.

The Baronet's Daughter.

I.

THE Baronet's daughter was fair and free,
And lovers came flocking from hill and fen:
"I never shall love any man," said she,
"While liars are liars and men are men."

II.

The Baronet's daughter married an earl;
And her face grew to marble, her heart grew to stone,
For she knew that the years had brought in their whirl
The love that is given but once and for one.

III.

The Baronet's daughter whispered a place
Where the roses gleamed in the perfect day:
"Kiss me," she said; and in that embrace
They wedded and parted for ever and aye.

IV.

The Baronet's daughter lives her life,
And her name is a by-word from Sheba to Dan.
And her lover has taken another to wife:
For she was a woman, and he is a man.

R.

The House that Jack Built.

By DARLEY DALE,
Author of "FAIR KATHERINE," "THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH," etc.

CHAPTER I.

AT THE GATE OF THE TEMPLE BEAUTIFUL.

THE time was morning, the month was May, the place was Venice. The sea was calm, the sky was cloudless, the sun was shining brilliantly over the lovely water-city with her marble palaces, her narrow streets, her Temple Beautiful.

Coming out from that temple this May morning was an Englishman; there was no mistake about his nationality; his tall figure—he was a young giant compared with some Italians near him—his broad shoulders and chest, his fair complexion, his blue eyes, all proclaimed his Saxon origin; and he too, like the morning and the city and the temple, he too was beautiful.

Like a young King Olaf, he paused for a moment with his back to that lovely rainbow-hued church of Saint Mark and gazed upwards at the Campanile; then he walked towards the two granite columns which stand like two sentinels guarding the heart of Venice and paused between them, apparently waiting for some one to join him.

He evinced no signs of impatience; he seemed to be thinking deeply, and the thoughts were apparently happy ones, for his handsome face was glowing with hope and joy. No wonder, for Felix Oxburgh, as he stood gazing on one of the fairest scenes this beautiful world has to offer her weary children, was young, clever, handsome; he was heir to an old but not large estate in the east of England; he had the whole world before him, and he had just come to a decision which was to influence his whole life. He had been to mass; he was a Catholic, and he had settled upon his future career.

Presently he was joined by a friend, whose profession was as easy to guess as his country; there was little doubt that soldier-like gait and air, that smart, trim figure, so carefully dressed, be-

longed to an English officer. The new-comer was older, though not more than twenty five or six, than Felix; he was smaller and darker, and, though good-looking, not so strikingly handsome. He was under six feet, and he was gracefully rather than powerfully built; he had chestnut-coloured hair and moustache, dark blue eyes, and was considered very good-looking, if not strictly handsome; but his face lacked any expression of great intellectual power. In fact, Jack Lockwood was no genius, he was a man of average ability; a thorough gentleman and an excellent officer, with very little besides his pay to live upon.

"Here you are, Oxburgh; aren't you ready for breakfast?" said Mr. Lockwood, running his arm through his friend's.

"Yes; but I am in no hurry. Jack, I have decided what my future career is to be, and I am going back to England with you at once to break the news to my father."

"Break the news? Why? Will he disapprove?"

"Yes; he will at first; but Selsey and I between us will, I think, overrule his objections. Selsey is engaged to my eldest sister, you know."

"Selsey. I thought he was a parson in the East End of London, full of philanthropic schemes," said Lockwood.

"So he is. My mother and sisters are Protestants; it is only my father and I who are Catholics still, as all the Oxburghs have ever been, till my father married a Protestant. But Selsey is one of the best fellows living. I admire him immensely, in spite of his creed, saving your presence."

"How many sisters have you?"

"Only two; Frances, who is engaged to Selsey, and little Joy, who is only eighteen. I wish you would come down with me for a week or ten days, and see them, Lockwood."

"I will with pleasure."

"That is settled, then. I hope you'll help me to get my father's consent to my proposed career."

"I don't know what it is yet."

"I mean to be a doctor."

"A doctor?"

"Yes. You see, Lockwood, I am not well off now; I have only what my father allows me; but I shall be rich some day; until then, I feel I must do something to alleviate the misery that I know exists among the very poor. 'Silver and gold have I

none; but such as I have, give I thee.' I must give my strength, my talents, my life, to this cause; nothing short of that will satisfy me."

"But why be a doctor?"

"Why not be a priest? you mean. Because at present I have not a vocation for the priesthood. Moreover, Oxburgh must go to a Catholic; no Protestant can inherit it; and it would break my father's heart if it had to go out of the family."

"I did not mean that; it had not occurred to me; I only wonder why you have chosen the medical profession."

"I think it the noblest of all; moreover, I can, I think, do more good as a doctor than in any other way. I shall attend only the very poor, and, of course, gratuitously; I am not going to make money out of it. If Selsey insists on my taking nominal fees, they will go towards medicines. What do you think of it?"

"Quixotic, but like you. It is a grand idea, Felix; but do you think it will bring you happiness, earthly happiness, I mean?"

"Yes; I am sure it will. I am seeking the happiness of others, and in that search I shall, I believe, find my own; but, if not, why, t is all in the day's work, and I have no sort or shadow of doubt about the happiness it will bring hereafter."

"That is so like a Catholic; you all seem to regard this life as a mere school for the next world; like schoolboys you are always looking forward to the holidays."

"We certainly don't expect happiness here. Isn't it Schopenhauer who says Christianity is a pessimistic religion? There is a certain amount of truth in that saying."

"Well, I suppose it could hardly be otherwise with a religion whose symbol is an instrument of torture," said Lockwood.

"Do you expect great happiness in this world?"

"Yes, I do. I love my profession, I hope to get on in it; I am ambitious of glory, and, of course, I have my dreams of earthly love, though I have not yet met the girl who is to captivate me and teach me that there is a heaven even here below."

"Well, old fellow, I hope you'll find it is so, though I am not sure that is a good wish. But, for me, I shall be satisfied if I get to heaven hereafter. Meanwhile, suppose we go in to breakfast," said Felix.

"By all means. Felix, I wonder, if you and I could stand here fifty years hence between these two columns, what our views of

life would be then. Should we then agree with Solomon and say, 'all is vanity?' Love, glory, philanthropy, ambition, altruism, honours, riches, is it all vanity and vexation of spirit?"

"Much of it, I am afraid, is. But I think I have chosen the better part, and I do not fear the result, if only I have strength to follow the course I have chosen."

"Time will prove who is the wiser: I with my selfish hopes of love and glory, you with your unselfish hope of sacrificing yourself to others. Mine is the natural life, yours the supernatural; there is much to be said for both. Well, time will prove us."

With this they turned their backs on the Piazza, with its ducal palace and rainbow-tinted basilica, its columns and its Campanile, and went to their hotel to breakfast, intending to start for England that evening, whither we will follow them, for they are the heroes of this story.

CHAPTER II.

THE GOLDEN DAYS.

"In which she saw him first, when Lancelot came."

OXBURGH HALL, the home of Felix Oxburgh, stands on a slight eminence in a picturesque village in one of the eastern counties. The house itself is not large, but the gardens are celebrated in the neighbourhood for their beauty, and the park in which the house stands is extensive; but Mr. Oxburgh was not a rich man.

The Oxburghs were remarkable for being a very handsome family; the squire himself was a most aristocratic-looking handsome man between fifty and sixty; his fair hair was sprinkled with grey, and he was getting rather bald and just a trifle stouter than he used to be; but otherwise he showed no signs of age. His complexion was fresh and florid, his eyes remarkably blue, and his features might have been cast in some Greek mould, they were so regular. Hypercriticism might have discovered a haughty expression in his fine face, and pride was doubtless a considerable element in Mr. Oxburgh's composition, but unless roused by external circumstances it was a dormant one.

The squire never forgot he was John Oxburgh, of Oxburgh;

but then he was not always remembering it, and there is all the difference between the two. If other people forgot it, he reminded them of it.

His wife's beauty was of a different type. She was very small and very delicate, a little fragile creature who looked as if a high wind would blow her away. She had quantities of soft silky wavy brown hair, which waved over her forehead and made her delicate skin appear whiter even than it was, by contrast. To match this hair she had great brown eyes, whose pathetic expression had driven Mr. Oxburgh wild in his youth, and made him do what no Oxburgh had ever done—marry a Protestant. Those same sweet eyes had afterwards persuaded him to allow his daughters to be brought up in their mother's religion.

Add to these eyes small delicate features, a sweet expression, a languid manner and a low gentle voice and musical laugh, and you have the outward woman. As for character, happily, perhaps, for her husband, she had none in the sense the word is often employed, namely, a fine epithet for temper. She was not intellectual, neither was she a domestic woman. She did nothing as a rule but she did it well. She worshipped her husband, she loved her daughters, she idolized her son; and they petted and spoilt her, and treated her rather as a child than the mother of a family. Some women never grow up; Mrs. Oxburgh was such an one.

Her sitting-room was one of the pleasantest in the house. It was upstairs, and had a large bay window overlooking a part of the garden called the south terrace and the park beyond. Here were brought the finest flowers Perriam, the head gardener, could produce; here Mrs. Oxburgh spent the greatest part of her time, and here the squire would come a dozen times a day to see if she were all right, as he expressed it; here Jack Lockwood first made the acquaintance of pretty Mrs. Oxburgh and her daughters, about a week after he left Venice.

Felix was unavoidably detained in London, and as he was likely to be there at least a fortnight, Mr. Lockwood, whose uncle had recently been appointed vicar of Oxburgh, decided to spend a week or two at the Vicarage; and then when Felix came down, accept his invitation to stay at the Hall. He called at the Hall the day after he reached Oxburgh, and the squire happening to meet him in the garden, took him up to Mrs. Oxburgh's room, where that lady and her daughters were holding an animated conversa-

tion over a new bonnet which had just arrived for Mrs. Oxburgh and which did not meet with her approbation.

"Are you all right?" said the squire, as he walked into the room, followed by Mr. Lockwood.

"No, I am as cross as cross can be. Do look here, John; did you ever see anything so frightful?" exclaimed Mrs. Oxburgh, pointing to the new bonnet which she had just thrown on to the floor, to the infinite amusement of her daughters.

"I have brought a visitor, Felix's friend—Mr. Lockwood—to see you. Lockwood, I am sorry you should see at a glance what a virago my wife is; however, the family skeleton is unveiled at once. I shall have your sympathy, I am sure," said the squire, as he picked up the offending bonnet and sat down by his wife's side with it in his hand.

"Don't be so silly, John. Mr. Lockwood, I am so glad to see you. Let me introduce you to my eldest daughter, Miss Oxburgh, and my youngest, Miss Joy Oxburgh."

"The 'ringing Joy of the hall,'" quoted the squire.

"Do be quiet, John; you make Joy blush," said Mrs. Oxburgh, as Joy and Jack executed elaborate bows to each other.

And while the squire is pinching and pulling his wife's bonnet into shape, and trying to persuade her it is very pretty, and the three young people are exchanging commonplaces, we will look at the sisters.

Frances Oxburgh was a tall, fine girl, not strictly handsome, but very nice-looking, with a quiet, gentle manner; a person who you felt instinctively was to be relied upon in any emergency.

Joy was five years younger than her sister, her father's darling, who was sometimes naughty and had to be scolded and then forgiven; a bright, happy, laughing girl, full of health and life and spirits; full, too, of romantic dreams of knights-errant, of Galahads and Lancelots, particularly of Lancelots.

She had blushed crimson when her father called her the "ringing Joy of the hall," and when she blushed, Joy was lovely; as a rule she was rather pale, but her colour came and went very easily, and gave a varying charm to her type of beauty, which was not the regular chiselled features of her father and Felix, but depended largely on her colouring and expression. She had the same thick milk-white complexion as her mother, and the same waving brown hair, but Joy's hair had a reddish tinge which her

mother's lacked; and her great eyes looked blue in some lights and grey in others.

She was often called "Little Joy" by her family, but Joy was not small; by the side of her little mother she looked quite a big woman, though shorter and slighter than Frances.

And Jack Lockwood, as he looked at her, felt, "Here, by God's rood, is the one maid for me."

And she, foolish, romantic Joy, thought here was a man more like Sir Lancelot than any ideal man her imagination had ever conjured up, or any real man it had yet been her lot to see.

And so being thus favourably impressed with each other, they soon broke through the ice of their first meeting, and by the time the squire had convinced his wife the bonnet was really a very pretty one after all, Jack and Joy were laughing and talking like old friends.

"Well, perhaps you are right, John. I daresay it will suit me; I think I'll keep it after all. What do you say, Frances?"

"I am quite sure you will, mother, if father likes it," said Frances smiling.

"Ah! Frances, I am sure you will give in to Mr. Selsey far more than I do to your father."

"I hope she will for Selsey's sake, or he will be a terribly henpecked husband. Don't you think so, Lockwood, judging from the little you have seen?" said the squire.

"Judging from what Felix has told me, I don't think there is much fear of that, sir," said Jack smiling.

"So Felix told you all about us, did he? Now what did he say of me, please?" said Joy.

"He said you were very charming."

"Well, so I believe I am," said Joy, so naively that they all burst out laughing.

"There can't be two opinions on that point," said Jack.

"Well, no, I don't think there can. But suppose we have a game at tennis instead of paying compliments. Will you play, father?" said Joy; and Mr. Oxburgh consenting, they left Mrs. Oxburgh alone and went out to the tennis lawn.

And that night, instead of going to sleep as was her wont directly her head was on her pillow, Joy lay awake wondering if her Sir Lancelot were heart-whole, or if there were a Guinevere

somewhere in the background, and every time she closed her eyes Elaine's song rang in her ears:

> "Sweet is true love, though given in vain, in vain;
> And sweet is death who puts an end to pain:
> I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.
> Love, art thou sweet? Then bitter death must be."

Further than this Joy could not remember, but over and over again she kept whispering these lines to herself, till at last she fell asleep, muttering, "Love, art thou sweet? Then bitter death must be."

Was love sweet? Joy did not know; love was until now unknown to her.

The next day brought Jack Lockwood on some pretext again to the Hall; the morrow did the same, and so on it went every day till it soon became evident to the lookers-on that Joy was the magnet which attracted him. By the time Felix arrived with Mr. Selsey ten days later, Jack was on intimate terms with the whole family, and Joy was learning to answer the question, "Love, art thou sweet?" in the affirmative; nevertheless, though every thrush seemed to sing, "Sweet is true love," some subtle spirit was ever whispering in her ears, "though given in vain, in vain;" and so it happened when Felix came he noticed a change in Joy.

He left her a careless laughing child; he found her a woman still happy and gay, but there was a light in her eyes now there never was before; and there was a reason now for the bright red blushes which used to come and go without rhyme or reason, and the reason was not far to seek, for Jack Lockwood was ever near her.

Joy's face was not difficult to read at this stage of her existence; it was such a tell-tale face, so full of expression, that it told far more than its owner wished it to tell; was she pleased or vexed, gay or sad, hopeful or desponding, a glance sufficed to those who knew her to read her mood.

"You don't like Mr. Lockwood, Joy, I see," said Mr. Selsey, the evening of his arrival, when Jack had gone to the Rectory to dress for dinner at the Hall.

Mr. Selsey loved to tease Joy, of whom he was very fond, and she for once did not notice his irony, and was caught.

Oh! Tom, I am sure I do; he is Felix's friend; I like him very much," exclaimed Joy, blushing the colour of a peony.

"Do you indeed? What a pity he does not show any signs of reciprocating the feeling," continued Mr. Selsey.

"What a tease you are, Tom. Why, he is always after Joy, isn't he, mother?" said Frances.

"Tom, you are odious; I can't think what Frances sees in you," said Joy rather petulantly.

"Shall I tell you, Joy? She sees a fine handsome man, a popular preacher, and her devoted slave," said Mr. Selsey.

A popular preacher Mr. Selsey certainly was, and a very charming little man, but he was remarkably plain, and so small that if it had not been for his flashing black eyes, he would have been insignificant also; but he was fond of talking of his own beauty in this ironical strain. Neither was he likely to be a slave to Frances; devoted he was, but the slavery, if there were any, would be on her side, and Frances would not have had it otherwise.

He was a rich man, but hitherto he had lived very simply, spending a great deal of his income on various philanthropic schemes for what he was wont to call the promotion of Christian happiness. He had a living in the East End of London, where he lived in lodgings, but he was looking out for a house in the West End to which to take his bride; and one of the objects of his present visit was to get Frances to fix the day for their marriage; the other object was to help Felix to persuade the squire to consent to his entering the medical profession.

Before dinner, on the evening of their arrival, Felix carried him down to the smoking-room to discuss this latter question with his father. Mr. Selsey was an inveterate smoker, and when he had lighted his pipe, he sank into an easy-chair to enjoy what he rarely indulged in, an idle hour.

"Well, Selsey, what is your latest extravagance?" said the squire.

"A free public library for my parishioners, with a lecture-hall adjoining."

"Have you the money?"

"Some of it, but I am open to subscriptions, Mr. Oxburgh."

"I dare say," said the squire, buttoning his coat up with a

smile, which Mr. Selsey knew meant he would give him a cheque before he left.

"Well, Felix, and have you decided on your future yet? I hope your ideas are less Utopian than Selsey's?" said the squire.

Felix and Mr. Selsey exchanged glances.

"Yes, I have decided," said Felix.

"What do you wish to do?"

"I wish to study medicine," said Felix.

"Study medicine! what for?" said the squire in amazement.

"To become a doctor."

"A what? A doctor? You are joking, my boy."

"No, sir, I am not. I mean it."

"Then you must be mad."

"No, I am quite sane, I believe."

"But it is impossible; you can't be a doctor."

"Why not, father?"

"Because you are an Oxburgh."

"I don't see that that affects the question; it is the noblest profession there is."

"Quite so; I perfectly agree with you there, but at the same time one must have regard to the fitness of things; and it is not fit that the future squire of Oxburgh should be a doctor. If you choose to study medicine, you can't possibly practise."

"I don't mean to, in the ordinary sense of the term," said Felix.

"Then what on earth do you mean to do?"

"To go about the world doing good to my fellow-creatures, or at least trying to do so."

"But why do you conceive the study of medicine is a necessary antecedent to this highly useful career?" said the squire sarcastically.

"Because I wish to heal the sick among other things; in fact, that will be my main work, to doctor those who are too poor to pay for a doctor," said Felix.

"And draw upon yourself the hatred of the profession you so justly admire."

"I don't fear that. The medical profession is a very generous one; besides, I shall do it no harm, as I shall only attend the poor, reserving to myself the right of deciding who are the poor,

and that without payment; I cannot do other doctors any harm," said Felix.

"It is madness. Selsey, what is your opinion?"

"I think it is a grand idea, sir, and I hope you will not oppose it," said Mr. Selsey.

"But what is it to lead to?"

"To nothing in a worldly sense. I do not expect or wish to gain riches, fame, or honours. I wish to fail from a worldly point of view; I shall aim at failure, and I shall succeed," replied Felix.

"It is a wild, Quixotic scheme; is your whole life to be spent in doctoring impecunious patients for the love of humanity?"

"No, I should like to supplement my medical calling by going about the country lecturing," said Felix.

"Accompanied, Mr. Oxburgh, by a coffin-like apparatus he has been constructing, which contains a board on which he contemplates sketching illustrations to his lectures," interrupted Mr. Selsey.

"He is mad; he deserves to be locked up far more than half the lunatics now in asylums," said the squire.

"But you consent to allowing me to indulge my mania, don't you, father?" said Felix gently.

"You should never contradict the insane, you know, sir," said Mr. Selsey.

"Selsey, you are as bad as Felix; he has caught this altruistic craze from you, I believe."

"Father, you have never refused me anything in my life; you won't refuse me this, will you?" said Felix in his winning manner.

"I must consider it. What does your mother say?"

"She approves of it; so does Frances," said Felix.

"Of course, women have no real opinions. I wonder what Amy Keppel will say; I should like to hear her view of the matter before I decide. I will send for her. Let me see, I have missed the post; I will telegraph to her to come on Thursday, the day after to-morrow," said the squire, going to his own room to write the telegram.

"If any one can dissuade him Amy will," he remarked to his wife later on.

"I don't think any one will dissuade him from this; he con-

siders it his vocation, and unless you positively forbid him he will follow it," said Mrs. Oxburgh.

'I can't forbid him; he is of age, he can choose for himself; all I can do is to persuade him to abandon it. By the way, haven't you asked Lockwood to stay in the house this week?"

"Yes, he comes on Saturday for a week. Why?"

"Because what room is Amy to have? The right wing is being papered; we have only two spare rooms available just now, except the haunted room, and you can't put her there."

"No, of course not; one of the gentlemen must have that. I daresay Mr. Selsey won't mind; he is not nervous. I'll ask him, or get Frances to do so; he can sleep in the red room till Mr. Lockwood comes to stay."

"Practically he is staying here; he spends most of his time here. Joy seems to have made a conquest," said Mr. Oxburgh.

"Yes, I think it is a case; he is a very charming fellow, an excellent son, and Mrs. Danby tells me Colonel Danby has the very highest opinion of him."

"He has very little besides his pay, though; however, Joy is so young, they can afford to wait, and if it comes to anything, I shall insist upon their doing so. He dines here to-night, I suppose," said the squire, as the dinner gong sounded.

"Lockwood, have you ever met my niece, or rather Mrs. Oxburgh's niece, Miss Keppel?" said the squire at dinner.

"No, sir, I don't think I have had that pleasure," replied Mr. Lockwood.

"She is a very pretty girl, and very fascinating; she is coming on Thursday, so buckle on your armour," said the squire.

Joy knit her pretty brows into the semblance of a frown at this speech, but Mr. Lockwood whispered something in an undertone which soon dispelled it.

"I am sorry your cousin Amy is coming," said Mr. Selsey, afterwards, to Frances, for Miss Keppel was no favourite of his, and, as Frances knew, the dislike was mutual.

The truth was, Mr. Selsey was a very good judge of character, and he had formed a very just estimate of Miss Keppel, who a year or two ago had tried her powers of fascination on him, and failing to bring him under the spell of her charms, had taken a violent dislike to him.

Frances did not like her cousin; very few ladies did like Amy

Keppel; even Mrs. Oxburgh, who was never heard to say an unkind thing of any one, could speak sharply of her niece, her only sister's only child. With the squire she was a prime favourite, and Felix, though alive to some of her failings, was undoubtedly very fond of her.

Joy was perhaps one of the few women who liked her; she was flattered by the friendship of an attractive girl several years older than herself, who had the reputation of bringing every man she met to her feet; but yet Joy, if she had spoken the truth, would have preferred that her cousin's present visit should be deferred.

This was not to be; on Thursday Miss Keppel arrived while Mr. Selsey, Jack Lockwood and the young Oxburghs were at a garden party.

The squire met his favourite niece, and as he drove her home, told her of Felix's mad project, and told her also he had sent for her that she might use her influence to dissuade him from it.

"I'll do my best, Uncle John; but what is a poor, stupid little thing like me to do with a great, clever man like Felix?" she said.

"Great donkey, I can turn him round my little finger," she thought.

"If any one can dissuade him you can, Amy," said the squire.

"It is very noble of him to sacrifice himself in this way; I can't help admiring him, though of course it won't do to let him see that," she said.

"The romantic idiot. I have not common patience with him," she thought.

"Frances and your aunt encourage him," said the squire.

"Dear Frances is so high-minded, she would be sure to approve," she said.

"Goody-goody prim fright, I should like to pinch her," she thought.

"And Aunt Mary is so unworldly, she would be sure to look at it in the highest light," she said.

"Canting creature, I wish she'd depart to the next world," she thought.

"Selsey of course backs him up," said the squire.

"Of course, Mr. Selsey is almost as noble as Felix," she said.

"He is the greater fool of the two," she thought.

"He is staying with us," said the squire.

"How delightful! I am so glad," she said.

"I would not have come if I had known it," she thought.

"And young Lockwood is here too; we like him exceedingly. He is a very good-looking fellow, sweet on Joy," said the squire.

"Darling Joy! I am so glad," she said.

"Little minx! I'll spoil her game for her," she thought.

And then they reached the Hall, and the squire helped his niece out of the dog-cart.

She was exceedingly pretty; nay, she was more than pretty, she was beautiful; there was no doubt about that. Her greatest enemy, and she had several enemies, could not find a fault in those perfect features, that exquisite complexion, that faultless figure, those charming manners, that silvery laugh, that soft voice, those coaxing ways.

Then she was so accomplished; she sang well, she played beautifully, she sketched prettily, she danced perfectly, she spoke French and German almost as well as English, for she had lived abroad for two years; she rode, and she could talk well on most subjects, though she rarely opened a book except a novel.

One thing she did not do, she did not play tennis; she was too wise in her generation for that. She had no idea of getting hot or spoiling her complexion in the sun, or putting herself into an ungraceful attitude for the sake of hitting a stupid tennis-ball over a net.

Not she, indeed.

Amy Keppel was one of those people who are never seen in *déshabillé*; there was never a ribbon nor a hair astray about her; she always looked as fresh at the end of a ball as when she arrived; how she managed it was a puzzle to everybody, but she did it.

And now as she greeted her aunt in her sweetest and most sympathetic manner after her journey, she looked as fresh and bright as one of Perriam's new-fashioned Shirley poppies with which her aunt's room was decorated.

"I wonder what this Mr. Lockwood is like?" thought Miss Keppel, as she selected her most becoming dress to wear at dinner that evening. "Sweet on Joy, is he? Joy is much too young to have a lover, a child like her indeed; she will have to look on now I have come, I can tell her. There she is," she added, as a tap was heard at her door.

Joy came in, looking so pretty that Amy, who had not seen her for a year, was struck with the way in which the pretty child had developed into a graceful, pretty girl.

"Joy, darling, I am so glad to see you; and how charming you look in that hat," said Amy, kissing her cousin on both cheeks.

"I am so glad you have come, Amy," said Joy, not quite truthfully.

"You little wretch! why didn't you tell me that horrid Mr. Selsey is here? Chains should not have brought me had I known it. I'll pay you out," said Amy.

"In a way you won't like," she added mentally.

"I didn't know you were coming," said Joy.

"Who else is here?" said Amy.

"Only Mr. Lockwood," said Joy, blushing.

"Is he nice?" said Amy.

"Yes, I think so," said Joy.

"Joy, you wicked little creature, tell me all about it, directly," said Amy.

"There is not very much to tell," said Joy, but she sat down, and when the first bell rang Miss Keppel knew, as she intended to know, exactly how far matters had progressed with Mr. Lockwood and her young cousin.

"It is a case, I believe. Amy Keppel, look your best this evening or I'll never forgive you," said Miss Keppel when Joy had gone, as she looked at her pretty self in the cheval glass. "I shall do," she muttered as, after contemplating her perfect chiselled features in silent admiration for some minutes, she put the finishing touch to her toilette and went down to her aunt's room, where the family usually assembled before dinner.

She was the last to enter, and when Mr. Lockwood was introduced to her he thought she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen, and wondered if Felix were in love with his pretty cousin, who devoted herself exclusively to him for that evening.

"Mr. Selsey, I hope you don't mind having the green room," said Mrs. Oxburgh, in an under-tone, to her future son-in-law.

"Not at all, Mrs. Oxburgh; I have no faith in ghosts; on the contrary, I should rather like to see one," said Mr. Selsey, who with his dark clipped beard and moustache was so exceedingly like a monkey, that perhaps Miss Keppel might be excused for having christened him the gorilla.

"Is the gorilla going to sleep in the haunted room?" she asked of Felix, for her quick ears had caught his reply.

"I believe so, he is not nervous," said Felix.

"Oh! how brave of you, Mr. Selsey. Even Felix would not do it, would you, Felix?" said Amy.

"I would rather not, I confess," said Felix.

"What is supposed to happen? Forewarned is forearmed; I should like to be prepared for the entertainment," said Selsey.

"Oh! I can tell you. I know all about it. First you will hear tap, tap, tap at the window, and then you'll hear knock, knock, knock at the door, and then if you look out of the window you'll see a coffin borne by two veiled figures pass slowly by and disappear in the conservatory," said Amy.

"I should avoid looking out if I were you, Selsey," said Mr. Lockwood.

"On the contrary, I shall make a point of looking out if the ghosts are kind enough to tap at the window; I should exceedingly like to make their acquaintance."

"Selsey, you are an utter sceptic as regards ghosts; you are as bad as the Laureate," said the squire.

"Yes, Tom; it is very disrespectful of you to treat our family ghost in this way," said Frances.

"What is the origin of the story?" said Mr. Selsey, still sceptical.

"One of our ancestors died in that room, and ever since has resented the room being used by any one else, I believe," said Frances.

"I think there is some story about his having been moved upstairs in his coffin, which apparently displeased the old gentleman," said Felix.

"Has any one ever seen these ghostly bearers?" said Mr. Selsey.

"No, every one who has slept there has heard the noises, but no one has had the courage to look out of the window," said the squire.

"Ah! but now Mr. Selsey is going to grace the haunted chamber with his presence, he will be so brave, he will look out, I am sure, won't you, Mr. Selsey?" said Amy.

"Undoubtedly I shall," said Mr. Selsey, as dinner was announced.

During dinner Amy was apparently absorbed in talking seriously about his future career to her handsome cousin ; but she was also taking stock of Mr. Lockwood and drawing out a plan for besieging the heart little Joy had almost won.

Utter unconsciousness of his presence was to be her course of action for the first day or two, then when she saw he was piqued, she would open a battery of flattering speeches such as few masculine hearts are proof against, and if at the end of the fortnight she was invited for, Mr. Lockwood had not transferred his affections from that silly little Joy, with her baby face and innocent eyes, to her charming self, Miss Keppel knew nothing of men.

And if she prided herself on one branch of knowledge more than another, it was on her acquaintance with the *genus homo.*

CHAPTER III.

TWO VOICES.

"WELL, Selsey, how did you sleep?" said the squire the next morning at breakfast.

"Excellently, sir."

"Didn't you see the ghost, Mr. Selsey?" said Amy.

"I saw nothing and heard nothing, except the creepers tapping against the window," said Mr. Selsey.

"But didn't you look out?" said Joy.

"Yes, but I saw nothing. Perhaps I may be more fortunate to-night; we can hardly expect the ghosts to appear every night like a dramatic company," said Mr. Selsey.

"Perhaps the rain stopped them," said Amy, who had no more faith in ghosts, really, than Mr. Selsey, although she had made up her mind that he should see something, if it were only to punish him for his scepticism.

"I hate his superior ways," said Miss Keppel to Joy after breakfast. "I should dearly like to try and frighten him, Joy; will you help me? It will be such fun," she added.

"Oh! Amy. How you delight in teasing Mr. Selsey. I am sure we can't frighten him."

"We will, Joy; we will try. Leave it to me, and if I don't arrange a coffin, borne by you and me, in the course of a day or

two, may I fail to persuade Felix that doctoring is beneath his dignity, which is my morning's work," said Miss Keppel.

It was a hopelessly wet morning, going out was impossible, and the young people were left to amuse themselves as best they might.

Mr. Selsey and Frances spent the morning in the drawing-room discussing art, science and schemes for humanizing the masses, and making love in the intervals of conversation.

Joy and Mr. Lockwood arranged flowers and pretended to be very busy, and were exceedingly happy; while Amy spent her morning with Felix in his carpenter's shop.

There are people in this wicked world from whom goodness seems to emanate, and who shed light and warmth on their fellow-creatures as rays from the sun. Such people are few, but Felix Oxburgh was one of them.

As Perriam, the gardener, once said of him, he was like the sun, before which most flowers open and unfold their beauty and give forth their fragrance.

Even Amy Keppel was sensible of this; she never felt so kindly disposed to her fellow-creatures as when with her cousin Felix.

There are other people who seem to give forth poison; like some flowers they are beautiful, but they taint the air which surrounds them; they are brilliant, but their light dazzles and blinds; they are charming, but it is the charm of the siren which lures to destruction.

Amy Keppel was one of these, and Felix knew it, though to him she always showed her better nature. She was dressed in a pure white dress this morning, her complexion could stand it, and she knew not one woman's in a thousand can; hence, she used to say, the rage for creamy whites, but none of them for Miss Keppel.

Her hair was always worn parted down the middle and smooth on her forehead for the same reason. Few people can stand it, but she knew the oval of her face was perfect, and she was not going to destroy it with a fringe or anything approaching one.

She might have been some saint this morning, she looked so pure and gentle, so meek and innocent in her white dress, her golden brown hair worn in a coronet of braids over that perfect face.

"Felix, dear, you must not think I don't appreciate the nobility

of the life you are choosing. I do; but you see I can look at it with an unprejudiced eye, and you won't mind me saying it, will you, Felix?"

And the prettiest of little white hands was laid on Felix's arm as he paused in his work to listen to his fair counsellor.

"No, Amy; say what you think."

"Well, I think it is very hard for dear Uncle John; he will consent, I know, if you wish it, but it will be gall and wormwood to him. For his sake, Felix, won't you give it up?"

And the little soft fingers tightened over Felix's arm.

"Amy, dear, I would directly if I did not hear a voice saying: 'Such as I have give I thee.' I have health, strength, time and talent, and I must give those to alleviate some of the suffering I see around me. 'Silver and gold have I none,' except what my father allows me, but such as I have I must give. It seems to me the highest life: 'we needs must love the highest when we see it,' you know."

"How handsome he is. I wish he would listen to my voice instead of this inward one, though," thought Amy. "I might do worse than marry Felix after all; I really think I like him better than any one in the world; but marry a peripatetic doctor! No, thank you, it is preposterous; he must give that nonsense up if we are to come to terms."

Some years ago, when Felix was seventeen, he had been madly in love with Amy. She flirted with him and encouraged him, and then laughed at him, and told him it was impossible. As he grew older Felix apparently got over this love's first flash in youth, and retained only a brotherly affection for his beautiful cousin.

Then he went to Oxford, and made the acquaintance of Mr. Selsey and one or two other enthusiastic spirits, the result of which was he caught the enthusiasm of humanity which animated them, and now nothing would satisfy him but the course he had chosen.

"Felix, it is splendid of you; but don't you think you could do as much good if you went in for politics or entered the service? You would be serving your country then, whereas you can only serve individuals now."

And now the other little hand closed over his arm too, and the beautiful face was raised pleadingly to his, and Felix knew a crisis in his life was at hand.

Amy saw he was wavering and she went on in that sweet siren voice of hers:

"Think of the good you could do in Parliament, or to the soldiers if you were in the army, and think how proud we should all be of you when you made grand speeches, or won a big battle. Felix, won't you give it up?"

Felix was fighting the biggest battle he ever fought in his life now, poor fellow.

Should he listen to her?

She had worldly wisdom all on her side, and why was she so deeply interested in him?

He was wavering, when she resumed:

"Felix, dear, give it up *for my sake.*" The last words were spoken in a whisper, loud enough for Felix to hear, and the delicate cheeks were suffused with pink, and the great blue-veined lids drooped modestly over the pale blue eyes, and the little white hands felt the strong man's arm tremble beneath them.

He felt as she meant him to feel: she was his now if he would give up this career; he had but to do that, and he could clasp this beautiful enchantress in his arms and make her his wife.

A few years ago this would have seemed to Felix the greatest happiness earth could give him. "Everything comes to him who knows how to wait," says the French proverb; but "everything comes too late," says a sadder one.

Not too late in this case as far as age was concerned, for Felix was only twenty-three, but too late if he were to give himself to the life he had chosen; not too late, as the natural man wished, but too late if he were to listen to the supernatural voice, calling him to the higher life.

Then was fought in that carpenter's shop, by Felix as he stood at his lathe in all the glory of his youth and strength and beauty, a battle over which the angels watched with keener interest than a battle between contending armies excites among them.

A battle in which was no roar of cannon, only two voices struggling for the victory, the still small voice within and the sweet low luring voice without.

A battle which would not disturb the balance of power, however it ended; a battle which would only decide the fate of two human beings, possibly of two human souls.

A battle in which no blood was shed, only a tear or two wrung from a strong man in his agony.

A battle not between two nations, but between two powers mightier than all the nations of the earth combined, between God and Mammon. And God won.

And Felix took the little soft white hands in his strong trembling ones, and looking down at his cousin's faultless face he said gently, but in a tone which told her more even than his words his decision was final:

"Amy, I can't give it up, dear. My life is not my own to do as I like with; the ordinary life of a country squire or of an officer would not satisfy me. There is work for me to do in the world and I must do it——"

"Felix, Felix, are you there?" interrupted the squire from the top of the few stairs which led to the carpenter's shop.

Felix hastily kissed Amy's forehead as he bent over her, and then went to open the door to his father, leaving her grave and silent by the window.

It was a turning point in her life as well as in Felix's; had he asked her then to be his wife and promised to give up the career he was bent on, she would have accepted him, and perhaps done her best to be worthy of him; but instead he had persisted in his course, and she had the mortification of knowing that her influence over him was at an end.

He no longer loved her, she thought, but there she was wrong; he did love her still, but he loved the Master in whose steps he meant to follow more.

Was it possible she was less attractive than she used to be?

She was a year or two older than Felix; was she losing her youth and the bloom of her beauty?

Mortification, anger, spite, took possession of her; the demon of revenge entered into her. She would be revenged on some one; not on Felix, she knew this was impossible; a stinging fly might as well try to revenge itself on a lion; but the volume of spite that was in her must find a victim on which to pour itself, and that victim was not far to seek.

In former days she had tried to win Mr. Selsey from her cousin Frances, from pure jealousy and selfishness; she could not bear to see any other woman loved; she had failed in her attempt and had hated both Frances and Mr. Selsey ever since.

Now she would wreak her vengeance on little Joy. At first she had only intended to flirt with Mr. Lockwood and make Joy miserable; now she made up her mind she would do more, she would marry him. She decided this as Felix and his father held a brief consultation on the threshold, as to the repairs of some cottages. By the time they had finished Miss Keppel had recovered her usual spirits and manner.

"By the way, Felix, where is this apparatus Selsey was talking of?" said the squire, coming into the shop, and, catching sight of Amy, he added:

"Oh! you are here, my dear Amy, are you?"

"Yes, Uncle John; I have been doing all I can to persuade this tiresome boy to give up that wild scheme of his; but I have failed; he won't listen to me. I am afraid you'll have to give in to him," said Amy.

The squire sighed.

"I must have another talk with you, Felix, this evening; meanwhile, where is this frame?"

"Here, pater," said Felix, pointing to a large black leather box which looked more like a coffin than anything else.

"Why, Felix, it is a coffin, or at least it would make a lovely one," said Amy.

"It is the very thing for our ghost," she thought.

"It is rather suggestive of a coffin; I think I must have a coloured cover for it," said Felix, as he opened the box and unpacked a frame containing canvas.

He put it together and explained its construction to his father, and then taking some chalks he made some sketches on the board, which so delighted the squire that he was half converted to his scheme before the luncheon-bell broke up the party.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GARDENER'S ROSE.

"One rose, my rose, that sweetened all mine air.
I cared not for the thorns; the thorns were there."

PERRIAM, the Hall gardener, was a poet. By this, it is not meant that he had ever published a volume of poems.

Perriam was also wise, and a wise man does not swell the rank of minor poets.

His method of publishing his poems was singular; it was also less expensive than the ordinary way; he talked aloud to his flowers.

Perriam knew that every flower is the expression of a divine idea, and to recognize the divine thought clothed in a rose or a lily is to be a poet in a certain limited sense.

"He is like a butterfly; he takes a passing interest in my flower," said Perriam one evening to his flowers as he closed the greenhouses and went home to his tea.

The butterfly in this case was Jack Lockwood; the flower, the gardener's only child, his "Rose of all his roses," the light of his eyes and the joy of his life, more wayward than any of his creepers, the only rose he had ever failed to train in the way he wanted it to go, but none the less dear to him for all that.

Mr. Lockwood had just been telling Perriam that his servant Green, to whom Rose was reported in the village to be engaged, was unworthy of her, and was leaving his service the following Saturday for drunkenness.

Perriam went home sad at heart, for he knew if Rose were bent on marrying this man she would do so in spite of anything he or any one else could say to the contrary.

A fair pink and white beautiful rose she was, but alas! the thorns were there.

Her thorns were not the only thorns against which Perriam often pricked his fingers; he had a thorn in his side where Adam lost a rib, for thorns frequently bear roses, and Mrs. Perriam bore no more likeness to her daughter than the parent thorn to the rose.

While Rose was of the ruddy, buxom, smiling, dimpling type of beauty, her mother was thin, pale, plain, with dark hair plastered smoothly down over her ears, and a sour expression.

Mrs. Perriam was a pessimist; had she been an educated woman, she would have sat at the feet of Schopenhauer; as it was, she frequently arrived intuitively at some of his conclusions.

"Where is Rose?" asked Perriam of his wife as he entered his cottage.

"Oh! with that new lover of hers, I suppose. I hate the fellow," said Mrs. Perriam shortly.

"I wish she would give him up," said Perriam.

"Wish away. Life is one long wish, which is never gratified,

because everything we wish for is a sham. Why do you wish that?"

"Because I hear he is not sober."

"And yet you let Rose go on fooling with him. I have no patience with you, Perriam. However, she shall never marry him if I can help it, so I can tell her."

Perriam, aware that interference on the part of his wife would do no good, turned the conversation.

"Wife, I want you to go with me to the rose show next Saturday; will you come?"

"I, Perriam? I never was one for gadding about after pleasure. Pleasure is like jam, it does not take much to make you ill; you can no more live on pleasure than you can dine on sugar. I have not been out for the day for seven years."

"I expect to win several prizes; I should like you to come."

Mrs. Perriam was secretly flattered by this piece of marital attention, so after making a series of excuses which Perriam parried successfully, she agreed to go.

"Something is sure to go wrong if I go out for the day, that is positive. However, I have given my word now to go and I'll go. Rain or shine, mind, Perriam, we'll go."

"We want rain," said Perriam.

It was his constant cry, he was in a chronic state of wanting rain, although even he could have dispensed with it the following Saturday, the day of the rose show, which turned out to be very wet. It was the morning spent by Miss Keppel in trying to dissuade Felix from being a doctor.

"It is very wet, wife; what do you say about going to the show?" asked Perriam, looking into his wife's room on his return from the Hall to breakfast.

"Say? Why, that I am going, to be sure. Didn't I tell you I would go, rain or shine? Do you suppose I am going to break my word because it happens to rain?" said Mrs. Perriam with asperity.

In her heart of hearts she was glad it was wet, it added in her opinion to her own merit in going at all.

"There is not much happiness in going out for the day in the rain, though," objected Perriam.

"Happiness, Perriam, is a will-o'-the-wisp; we all wander

through mire and rain to catch it, but we never succeed, for there is nothing to catch."

"Won't the rain spoil your clothes, though, wife?" said Perriam, leaving the question of happiness in general for that of economy in particular.

"To be sure it will," said Mrs. Perriam, taking out her best bonnet, apparently delighted at the prospect of spoiling it.

"I don't suppose I shall have a dry thread on me by the time I get to the station in this rain; but the rain isn't my fault. To hear you one would think it was. I did not send the rain; you are always wanting rain; now you have got it, and a nice fuss you are making about it," said Mrs. Perriam, proceeding to lace on a pair of new and very creaking boots.

"Why, how tired you'll be, mother, wearing new boots all day long," said Rose.

"Tired, of course I shall be tired; that is what I am going out for, isn't it, to be tired? My feet will ache, but what of that? Life is one long ache, an extra twinge here or there does not make much difference. Now, Perriam, I am ready. Good-bye, Rose; take care of the house. Nothing is certain in this world but death, or I should feel certain something will go wrong while I am away," said Mrs. Perriam.

The fringe of the prophet's mantle had surely fallen on the gardener's wife, for on their return from the rose show they found her prophecy fulfilled. Something had gone wrong, and that something was the gardener's Rose, who had gone off with Mr. Lockwood's servant, leaving a letter to say she had been married to him that morning. The rose was gone, but the thorns were there. Mr. and Mrs. Perriam bore the news very differently. Mrs. Perriam stormed in a most unphilosophical manner; Perriam was heart-broken and said nothing, but sat in his arm-chair, occasionally wiping away a tear, and listening to his wife's tirade against Rose without hearing a word of it.

"I am not surprised, not a bit. There is more biting than kissing in the world; no wonder we are bitten," said Mrs. Perriam.

Perriam made no reply.

"Well, are you going to spend the rest of your life in that chair? Why don't you go up to the Hall and see Mr. Felix about it? If any one can help us, he can, though what's done can't be undone."

Perriam, however, would not be roused to any action; he sat there chilled in his damp clothes, ate no supper, and at ten o'clock went up to bed, without having gone the round of his greenhouses, which he did every night, and there for the present we must leave him.

It was a fine moonlight night, the rain having ceased before sunset, and Mr. Selsey, who spent a great part of the evening walking up and down the south terrace, smoking and composing his sermon for the following day, went in to his room reluctantly about eleven o'clock.

He suffered from dyspepsia, and that night a fit of indigestion kept him wide awake, tossing and turning, till at last his nerves were so excited that he started at every sound.

It was a calm night, scarcely a breath of air was stirring, so he knew every noise he heard must be caused by human agency; there was no wind to tap at the window or blow the creepers against the glass that night. About half-past twelve he thought he heard footsteps outside his door, in fact he was sure he did; a few minutes later he was equally sure a side door into the garden just outside his room was opened.

He started up in bed, thinking there were burglars about and regretting he had no pistol in his room; he was considering what course to pursue when three distinct knocks were knocked on his bed-room door.

"Come in," he cried, but no one came in, no one answered.

"Very odd. I certainly heard some one," thought Mr. Selsey, and the next minute the knocks were repeated.

"Come in; who's there?" he called out; but no one answered, no one opened the door; only a few seconds later the mysterious knocks were repeated.

Mr. Selsey jumped out of bed, struck a light, and opened the door; he peered out of the room, and looked up and down the landing, but no one was to be seen. The side door, however, was unlocked, and yet he thought he had locked it when he went to bed; however, he supposed he had forgotten to do so, so he turned the key and got into bed again, leaving the candle burning.

Hardly was his head on his pillow when he was startled by three distinct taps on the window. What on earth could it be? He sat up in bed listening and wondering, and presently the taps

were heard again. Then he remembered he was in the haunted room, and Miss Keppel's words that first he would hear three knocks at the door and then tap, tap, tap at the window were recalled to his memory.

"It is the ghost, I suppose; I don't half like it. However, I may as well see what is to be seen," thought Mr. Selsey as he jumped out of bed and, crossing the room, pulled aside the window blind and looked out.

To his right was the side door, which being on a line with his window he could not see; to his left was the conservatory, the door of which was open; when he looked out he was startled to see passing slowly from the side door of the house towards the conservatory two veiled figures bearing on their shoulders what looked like a coffin, over which was thrown a somewhat gorgeous white and gold pall. The figures were evidently women; they were swathed in soft pale blue draperies, their faces hidden by some of the folds, and they walked with a gliding movement noiselessly across the gravel towards the open conservatory door. It was a most ghost-like procession, and the moonlight added to its weird effect; but not for one moment did Mr. Selsey believe the vision was supernatural; he had taken too many funerals in his life not to know the exact shape of a coffin, and a glance told him the coffin he was looking at was nothing but Felix's sketching frame, and he shrewdly suspected the bearers were Miss Keppel and Joy.

"Young monkeys, I'll give it to them," he muttered, as he hastily donned some clothes and, opening the window, which was a French one, he stepped out on to the gravel path.

As he did so the procession vanished among the tropical plants of the conservatory, and almost at the same moment a fearful shriek rent the air, followed by the sound first of some one falling, and then there was a rush and a noise, and he heard Amy Keppel's voice saying:

"Run, Joy, run for your life."

As she spoke, Mr. Selsey, who at that moment entered the conservatory, saw one of the veiled figures, the smaller, which he knew to be Amy, disappear into the drawing-room; but the other, whom he suspected to be Joy, rushed to the other end of the conservatory, from whence the shriek had come. To make assurance doubly sure, the pall had fallen off the imitation coffin,

which was lying on the floor, and showed it to be, as he had guessed, Felix's sketching frame.

The truth was, the sight of this coffin-like apparatus had proved too much for Amy to resist, so she had contrived this little dramatic entertainment for Mr. Selsey's benefit, having, after much difficulty, succeeded in persuading Joy to join her. All would have gone well, and the girls would have escaped into the drawing-room before Mr. Selsey reached them, if it had not been for an unforeseen occurrence.

To their surprise and horror, on reaching the conservatory, conscious that Mr. Selsey was at their heels, they saw among the shrubs at the other end the figure of a man, who, before they had time to recognize him, threw up his arms, gave an awful scream and fell senseless to the ground. Then Miss Keppel, afraid that they should be caught, and careless as to who it was they had so frightened so long as they escaped, had urged Joy to follow her. Joy, however, frightened as she was, for she had no idea who their victim was, could not go to bed and leave some one fainting in the conservatory, so she glided through the shrubs to the prostrate form and, kneeling down, bent over it and tore the muslin from her face just as Mr. Selsey reached the spot, white with anger, not so much against Joy as against Amy Keppel.

Perhaps, if he could have foreseen that he was years hence to witness in that same spot a very similar scene, in which Amy played a very different part, his anger would even then have been changed to the deepest pity.

(To be continued.)